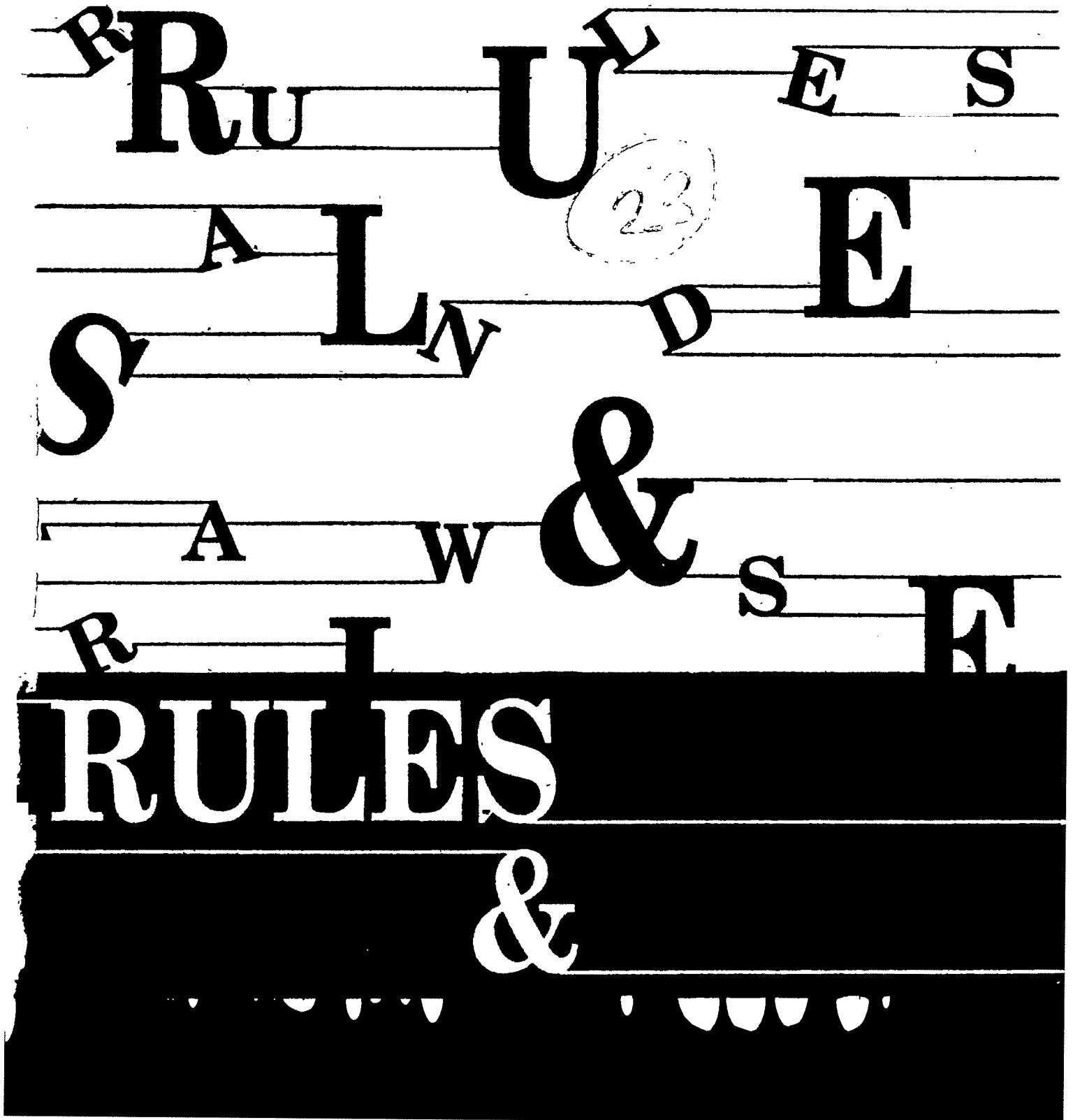


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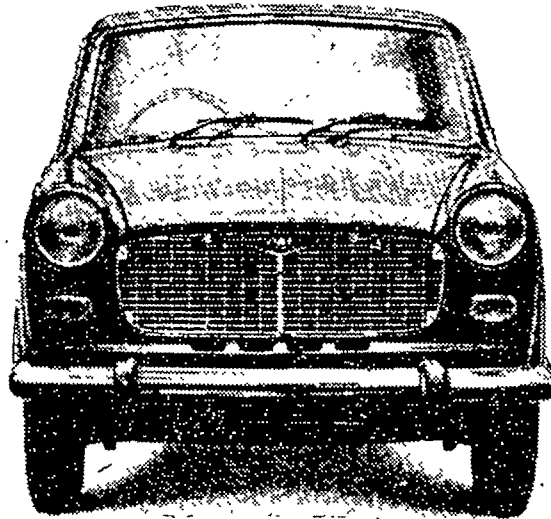
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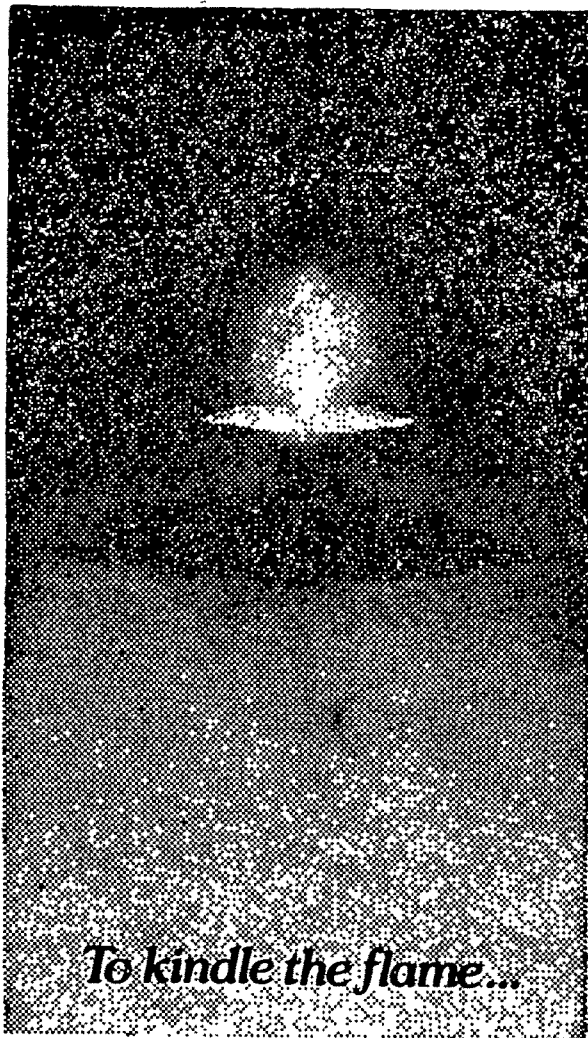
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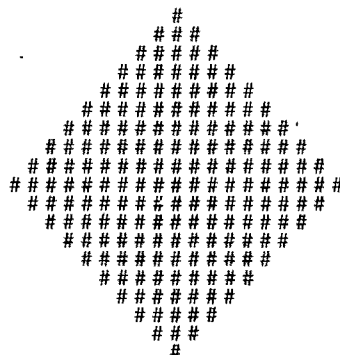
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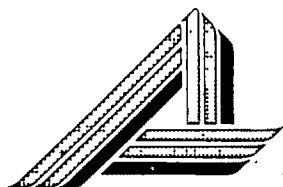
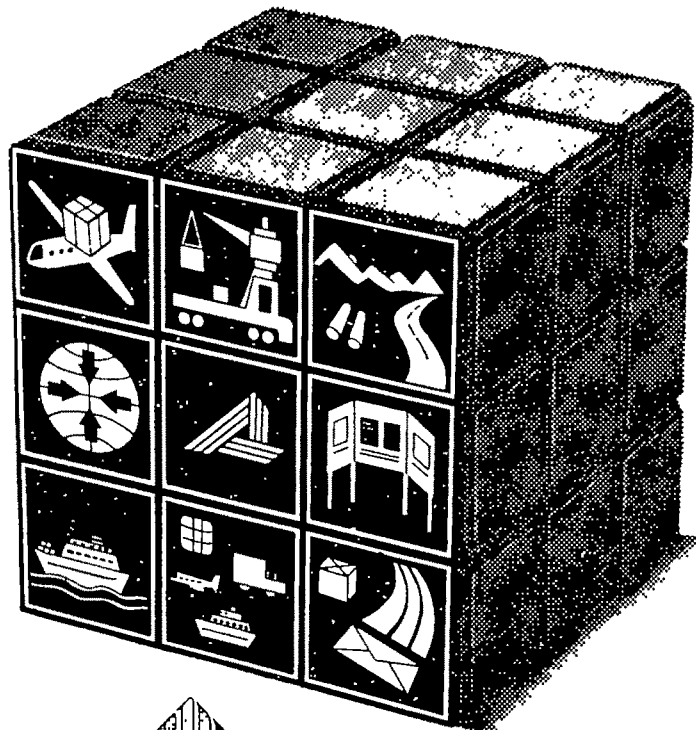
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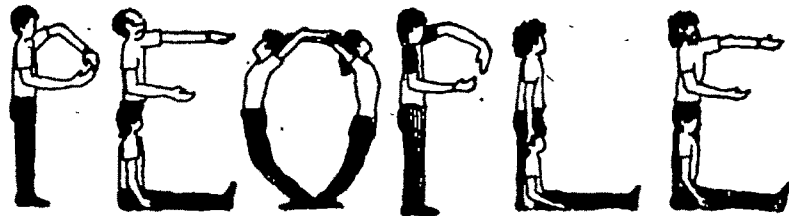
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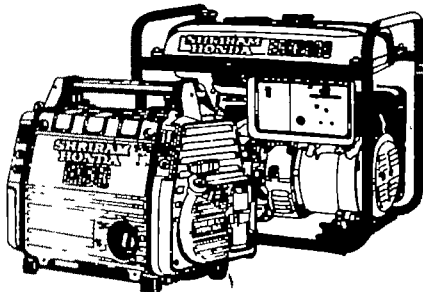
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NEXT MONTH: THE LIMITS OF TOLERANCE

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The problem

ASKED which flavour of ice cream he wanted, Richard Feynman, the physicist, would always say, 'Chocolate'. It saved him the bother of having to make a choice which would be inconsequential anyway. In choosing his dessert or in doing his physics, Feynman had learned how to use 'rules' to good effect.

In an eloquent essay, 'Is there an Indian way of thinking?',¹ the late A. K. Ramanujam drew a contrast between the habits of thought that have prevailed in India and those in the West. In the Indian tradition, the *context* has been seen to be crucial in giving meaning to an act or a statement. In contrast to this context-sensitivity, the western tradition in the last few centuries has searched for context-free formulations for its concepts and rules:

All societies have context-sensitive behaviour and rules – but the dominant ideal may not be the 'context-sensitive' but the 'context-free'. Egalitarian democratic ideals, Protestant Christianity, espouse both the universal and the unique, insist that any member is *equal* to and *like* any other in the group. Whatever his context – birth, class, gender, age, place, rank, etc. – a man is a man for all that. Technology with its modules and interchangeable parts, and the post-Renaissance sciences with their quest for universal laws (and 'facts') across contexts intensify the bias towards the context-free. Yet societies have underbellies. In predominantly 'context-free' societies, the counter-movements tend to be towards the context sensitive: situation ethics, ... holistic movements in medicine (naturopaths who prescribe individually tailored regimens) are good examples. In 'traditional' cultures like India, where context-sensitivity rules and binds, the dream is to be free of context. So *rasa* in aesthetics, *moksa* in the 'aims of life', *sannyasa* in the life-stages, *sphota* in semantics, and *bhakti* in religion

define themselves against a background of inexorable contextuality.

Most societies employ both the context-sensitive and the context-free forms of concepts and rules; yet it was the western European societies that began to discover the advantages of forms which are valid regardless of context. The Periodic Table of Elements, for example, emerged through the labours of physicists and chemists in many countries over several generations. It is valid for a Kenyan and a Dane equally; a general, or 'universal', validity may be claimed for it. Much of the intellectual power of modern science and technology comes from its relentless search for context-free methods, concepts, rules, and presentations. It would be convenient in this essay to use the terms 'rules' and 'laws' for such context-free formulations, aware that context sensitive rules and laws are also possible

Rules are of various kinds. We may observe a regularity in nature, and formulate the rule underlying this regularity. Newton's Laws of Motion, and all scientific theories, are rules of this kind. These are statements concerning what there 'is'. Then there are 'ought' rules.

Rules concerning 'purity' and 'pollution' which underpinned the caste order were of the 'ought' kind, these were promulgated as if these were universal ideas, which ought to apply to everyone. Other rules may concern personal practice: to say *namaz* five times a day. Medieval Europe saw mushrooming monasteries which enjoined their monks to pray assiduously, up to eighteen hours a day!² Among the most important functions of such rules is that of stilling the anxieties that may beset one in turbulent times.

One crucial difference between societies (and persons) is this: some of them keep reviewing and revising their rules and routines continually; others place these outside the reach of critical judgment. What price the rule? is a question that is often blasphemous to ask. The distinctive quality of Europe's attitude to its rules came to be that it learned the advantages of regularly subjecting them all to cost-benefit appraisals.

'Keep left' and 'attend to traffic lights' are powerful rules in the sense that these can keep tens of thousands of

¹ The inspiration for this issue of SEMINAR has come from a seminar on 'Constitutional history and rule of law' organized by Max Mueller Bhavan, Bangalore, the National Law School of India University, and other institutions at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, February 1995

The Indian Council of Social Science Research has facilitated my work on this theme through long-term grants for research on 'Societal designs in history'.

¹ Reprinted in this issue of SEMINAR, pp 41-49

² My historical allusions rest largely on my *Wages of segmentation: comparative historical studies on Europe and India* New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1995

vehicles moving in orderly ways – provided, of course, that the rules are understood and observed. These can be applicable to cyclists as well as truck drivers, regardless of religion, language, gender, or the colour of their clothes. Relatively simple rules, framed carefully, can help keep order even in phenomena of very large scale and complexity.

Rule-making has its detractors. It can be seen as a sinister device in the hands of the rule-maker for establishing hegemony, for dominating others, though one may wonder whose hegemony 'Keep left' advances. True, 'rules' and 'laws' can become but thin cloaks for individual and sectional interests, but power and dominance do not disappear if we dispense with rules. Surely it should be possible for groups, institutions, and societies to organize themselves so as to ensure that 'rules' and 'laws' work transparently, equitably. What they have to do is to *learn*, collectively, how to do so.

Rule-making may also be seen as the passion of mediocre minds, a formula for choking spontaneity and creativity. Yet living in a complex society presents countless everyday situations demanding routine responses. Spontaneous creativity in managing a large hospital or heavy rail traffic, in handling an oil rig, or in operating an assembly line can spell disaster. An intelligent regime would work out rules which define (i) what is essential in the given setting and (ii) how to make sure that the essentials are in fact done. Managing a great deal of such routine effectively can release enormous amounts of time, energy, and resources – for putting spontaneity and creativity to benign purposes.

Put otherwise, in handling large scale phenomena, you cannot avoid general rules; though rules which are designed badly, or applied mindlessly, will bring you quickly to grief. Indeed it is through the constant search for a great variety of general rules that the spectacular enlargement of scales, which is the mark of our times, has become possible. There has been a manifold expansion of the scale of social activities and of possible influences, made available by such technology as the railways and satellite communication – and behind that technology stands the entire industrial revolution.

That industrial revolution has been spurred, over the past century and more, by such movements as that for 'time

and motion study', a routine for defining the most economic mode for completing a task and incorporating it into manuals for use at work. The initial attempts, such as Frederick Taylor's (1856-1915), tended to see the worker essentially as a machine, a source of mechanical energy to be used in predetermined ways. The management *gurus* of today would laugh at that narrow focus, they urge corporations to create large spaces for their workers' intellectual and emotional involvement in their work. The need for rules has not been abandoned, it is the nature of preferred rules that is being changed. Fresh experience can always lead to good rules being *revised*.

We have been talking about recourse to rules and laws in personal practice, science, technology, management, and so forth; it is time now to turn to the important matter of *legal rules*, clearly a sub-set of the larger category of general rules. The laws passed by parliaments and legislatures are rules which, ideally, codify the body of ideas with which a society wishes to govern itself. The legal codes are then turned over to specialists – judges, administrators, and the like – to apply in a fair, impersonal manner. That is the ideal; and the legal apparatus has survived and spread because the reality approaches the ideal better than is available in alternate modes of regulating societies.

Legal codes can be for societies what a personal rule is for an individual. Societies which learned to use primogeniture, the rule that the eldest son succeed to paternal office or estate, gained the same advantage as Feynman did with chocolate ice cream: it saved them the bother of having to decide – or to battle over – who would succeed on each occasion. Europe began to try the idea early in the ninth century, by the end of the thirteenth, it had taken root in kingships and also in the aristocracy at large. The eldest son might not be the most competent; but the costs of providing supplementary personnel were minuscule against the disadvantages of dividing the domains or of fighting it out, Mughal style, at each succession.

Primogeniture was an elementary rule in political management. More complex rules of political management go into legislation and constitution-making as it has evolved over the last seven or eight centuries – and continues to evolve in 'international law. *Magna Carta*, signed in 1215, was a compact – a statement of rules – in which the then king

of England was, in effect, forced by his nobles to promise to behave reasonably in future.

A tradition of legislation and constitution-making, grounded in a country's history, can provide the rules of the game so that political competition can proceed in non-destructive ways. We can thank T.N. Seshan for his labours, however ham-handed occasionally, for cleaning up the Indian electoral process. This may yet be a key move in saving Indian democracy.

In the older democracies, there is seldom need for Seshan's counterparts to act as forcefully as him in conducting elections. His campaign is extraordinary. It was needed because the idea of electoral competition has only shallow roots in Indian history; yet it has been applauded widely because it meets a need that people felt in their bones. In pre-colonial India, political legitimacy rested on conquest, or on descent from conquerors. 'Justice' was a matter of one's castemates' opinion – or, occasionally, royal mediation or intervention.³ The idea of being governed by legal codes, formulated by those who would be governed, or at least by their representatives, was a colonial importation into India.

The potential advantages of working with general legal codes, as with other general rules, remain even if the idea is alien to a society. What may be advantageous to the society overall, however, is not necessarily advantageous to groups which carry weight within the society at a particular time. If I am a Rajput and can command a private force, I am only enacting my *dharma* if I secure my own election by trying to capture the polling booths. The trouble of course is that, if too many of us do so, electoral competition as a route to political legitimacy loses its credibility.

Difficulties of this kind are not unique to India today. You have them in comparable, or more acute, forms wherever an older political regime collapses, as in Russia or eastern Europe, or where a regime's character is changing dramatically, as in South Africa or China at present. In principle, all large societies stand to gain from working with general laws; and western business corporations demand it for their own reasons. However, the necessary technical skills and, more important, the necessary collective understandings may be scarce; and this can present very slippery problems of political management.

In this part, my argument has been that, in the management of large, complex societies like contemporary India, enormous common gains can accrue from learning to work effectively, and fairly, with general legal codes. Europe's skills in this area began to be formalized in the twelfth century; and these had drawn upon the earlier Roman beginnings. The technology of law may be alien to us, but so is the technology for making steel or computers. We have to take each on its merits.

Then there are the difficulties of a plural society. The richness of India's plural traditions is often celebrated, for there is a long history of their coexistence in the subcontinent; yet *how* that plurality managed to coexist is rarely considered. Several historians, working from different standpoints, have noted in recent years that, for orderly co-existence, India's religious diversity had to fit into a social hierarchy: in effect, a non-Hindu religious group fitted into the caste order as one more *jati*.⁴

Alternatively, rulers in India tolerated, and even subsidized, faiths other than their own. It has been suggested that this should be seen as 'cultural hegemony'.⁵ The dominance of the conquerors' 'own' religious and cultural style having been established, they would be generous with traditions whose carriers accepted the situation, as part of *legitimizing* the arrangement. It was the power, exercised by the ruling cultural group, that set the terms for order between groups.

It will be obvious that these earlier traditions avail little when the old hierarchies have collapsed beyond repair, where ruling groups need the recurring consent of the governed for legitimacy, and where widespread social violence can claim frightful tolls. For keeping order between groups in this setting, learning to work with general legal codes, which would apply to all citizens equally, fairly, may again be an optimal course, provided we are willing to learn to treat each other fairly and with dignity.

To sum up: the habits of seeking, and working with, general, context-free rules and laws are an important, potential resource for persons and societies. These are important because one good rule or law can describe (as in science) or regulate (as in traffic rules) a thousand or a million situations. It is a powerful resource also for regulating and improving our everyday social arrangements, provided we are willing to learn to put ourselves in the other's shoes – all the time.

Rules and laws are not panaceas; nothing is. Other societies have learned to employ them both for raising efficiency and for fostering their own orderliness. We can work for better rules and laws; but in the late twentieth century we cannot do *without* either. It is open to us, on scales small and large, to look for ways to use them to improve the quality of our social existence. Is it possible to learn from the thousands of years of history behind us, and not merely that of India, to give ourselves laws, for all of us, laws which address the late twentieth century, and the next one, better than the *dharmashastras* or the *shariat* can possibly do?

SATISH SABERWAL

4 Susan Bayly, *Saints, goddesses and kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian society 1700-1900* Cambridge CUP, 1989.

5 Shashi Joshi and Bhagwan Josh, *Struggle for hegemony in India 1920-47 vol. 3. Culture, community and power, 1941-47* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994.

3 The case of the *kazi* was different, but not enough that the argument here would be affected

What is a natural law?

SUDHIR KAICKER

WHY is the sky blue? What are rainbows? Why is the sun hot? Why do eclipses occur? Why does a lodestone swing northwards? Why is ... ? The list of questions that one can ask about the physical world is endless; yet the corpus of knowledge that has resulted from the search for order in the universe can be comprehended in terms of a few *laws* or principles. Apparently the word law (Latin, *lex*) was first used in this context by Roger Bacon (1210-92) to describe regularities (Latin, *regula* = rule) in the behaviour of rays of light in reflexion.¹

It can be argued that the *modus operandi* of science – the ‘scientific method’ – originated with Bacon. It involves two overlapping activities: first (in the infancy of any science), the gathering of knowledge by carefully noting regularities in the phenomena under consideration; later (in its maturity), their explanation in terms of a few laws; followed by refinements in the observations and, if need be, yet more accurate laws.

¹ The law of the refraction of light when it passes from one medium to another requires for its description a greater mathematical maturity than was available in pre-Renaissance Europe. It was discovered more than three centuries after the death of Bacon by Willebrord Snellius (1591-1626).

Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was the first to express the regularities of planetary motion – recorded over the course of years of painstaking observation by him and by Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) – in mathematical terms. Since then it has become instinctive for physicists to assume that the laws of physics can be accurately stated in the language of mathematics. That language is a creation of the human mind yet it is free of any cultural content; and it has an internal consistency that places constraints on its form and growth. It is therefore a matter of extreme wonder that mathematics happens to be perfectly adequate to describe natural phenomena. In this paper we shall examine the differences in the nature of physical and mathematical laws.

The laws of physics are at any time provisional: they are never final, being always in a sequence of successive approximations to the truth. Physicists adopt a law that fits their observations within the limits of errors of measurement. If it is subsequently found that the observations cannot be supported by such a law, the law is modified. The new law is taken to be the standard until further observations force a change. Generally,

these modifications entail increasing complexity.² Occasionally, however, they allow a simpler interpretation than was provided by the earlier theory, or they provide a ground for understanding from where it is possible to subsume explanations of phenomena hitherto considered unrelated. Given a set of possible theories that purport to explain certain phenomena, the predilection of the physicist is *invariably* for the simplest. It is an article of his faith that in the absence of evidence to the contrary, the simpler law is more probably true.

Thus Kepler's observations enabled him to state three laws of planetary motion, which he expressed as mathematical equations. His laws encapsulated the observed regularities. Later, Isaac Newton (1642-1727) proved Kepler's laws to be a consequence of his inverse square law of gravitation; his one simple law explained the preceding three. And in our time Einstein derived Newtonian gravitation from the postulate that the curvature of space-time is caused by the presence of matter.

The preference for simplicity as a matter of principle is called Occam's Razor, named after William of Ockham (d. 1349?), but apparently stated in its present form by John Ponce of Cork in 1639: *Entia non sunt multiplicanda sine necessitate*—entities should not be unnecessarily multiplied.

Ultimately, however, laws are accepted not because they are simple, or even comprehensible, but because they are (to current knowledge) true, as judged by agreement between prediction and experiment. Faith in the correctness of Newton's law led astronomers to conclude that the observed perturbation in the orbit of Uranus could only be due to an unknown planet, and Neptune was found at the calculated position. However, Newton's law failed in accounting for the

excess motion of the perihelion of Mercury (some 43 seconds of arc per century) despite various attempts: an interior disturbing planet was suggested, but was never found. The discrepancy was later explained satisfactorily by the Einsteinian theory, which is now the standard.

Whe laws of quantum physics provide a more exact – yet a strikingly different and conceptually difficult – description of the microphysical world than their forbears, the laws of Newtonian or classical physics. There is in the new laws a complete breakdown of Laplacian determinism, that any future state of the universe is uniquely determined by its present state, just as its present state is inexorably a consequence of its past. 'An intellect,' wrote Laplace: 'which at any given moment knew all the forces that animate nature, and the mutual positions of the beings that compose it, if this intellect were vast enough to submit its data to analysis, could condense into a single formula the vast movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and that of the lightest atom: for such an intellect nothing could be uncertain; and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes.'

Whereas in classical physics the disturbance caused in a system by a measurement of a parameter, say position, or energy, can in principle be precisely accounted, and its effect removed, the results of measurement of a quantum system can be described only in terms of a *probability distribution*, and two identical measurements will generally not produce the same result. *There is a breakdown of determinism in principle.* However, if we conducted many measurements and averaged their results together, they would yield a probability distribution characteristic of the classical system.

This and other consequences of quantum mechanics are so peculiar that Feynman could remark: '...I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics.' However, our inability to provide the right interpretation of the principles which underlie the theory does not prevent us from applying it. It

is in fact the most outstandingly successful theory we have: its prediction for the magnetic moment of the electron agrees with experiment to within one part in ten billion.

The discovery of chaos has thrown yet another spanner into the Newtonian machinery for predicting the future state of an evolving dynamical system. Classical determinism held the Universe to be a mechanistic, clockwork system subject to a few rules: its evolution from the present state to any future state might indeed be difficult to predict, but none the less possible in principle, provided one had knowledge of the underlying forces and the computing power to calculate their effects. However, it turns out that in order to be able to do this one would require *infinitely precise* knowledge of the positions and velocities of its component objects.

Suppose there is but the slightest uncertainty in the specification of the initial state of a complex physical system; and suppose also that this system is subject to classical – and therefore exact – equations of motion; then, if its evolution depends sensitively upon initial conditions, the errors in the computation of its future state can build up to such an extent as to vitiate the computation. *Minor differences in the specification of an initial state can lead to large differences in the description of a later state.*

The later state is deterministic, but extremely sensitive to infinitesimal changes in its earlier state. Such systems are called *chaotic* in modern physics. The solar system is one such example: if the initial positions and velocities of the planets are not specified with infinite precision, the Newtonian predictions for these parameters will be completely wrong a mere four million years later!

For such systems Laplacian determinism, though possible in theory, is impossible in practice: deterministic dynamics, described by simple laws, can lead to repetitive patterns of motion, but also to behaviour that is so complex as to appear to be completely random. (This is why it is almost impossible for meteorologists to predict the weather: if its present

2 For example, one of the laws of light that Bacon knew was that it travelled in straight lines. Came Einstein, and he modified the law to state that light travels along shortest paths or geodesics, which are straight lines in Euclidean space only in the absence of gravitating matter.

global state cannot be accurately known, forecasts must necessarily be wrong.)

Chaos raises fundamental questions for which no answers are yet available: Given that order can generate periodicity as well as chaos, what is a natural law? How can chaotic systems composed of billions of interacting particles give rise to stable and predictable patterns of behaviour? Does chaos underlie the indeterminacy of quantum mechanics?

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, this much is certain: quantum indeterminacy and chaos have between them forever put paid to the determinism dreamt of by Laplace

The Scientist, wrote Poincaré³, 'does not study nature because it is useful to do so. He studies it because he takes pleasure in it; and he takes pleasure in it because it is beautiful. If nature were not beautiful, it would not be worth knowing and life would not be worth living...I mean the intimate beauty which comes from the harmonious order of its parts and which a pure intelligence can grasp.'

Some theories unify previously unrelated concepts that lead to peaks from where it is possible to comprehend a larger canvas of nature than previously, so that an underlying unity is visible where there was before an unrelated diversity. Most physicists would agree that such theories are *beautiful* or *elegant*, but such terms are difficult to define or quantify. Yet examples are not hard to find: Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism provided a unified description of the phenomena of electricity and magnetism, Einstein's theory of general relativity unified light and gravitation, while the quantum theory seeks to provide a unified explanation of all microphysical phenomena, and their large-scale co-operative effects. (In each instance, the new theories made predictions beyond the pale of the previous theories. These were verified and are evidence for the laws proposed.)

On simplicity and beauty in physical laws, Paul Dirac, one of the pioneer-

ing physicists of our time, wrote:⁴

The dominating idea in this application of mathematics to physics is that the equations representing the laws of motion should be of a simple form...What makes the theory of relativity so acceptable to physicists in spite of its going against the principle of simplicity is its great mathematical beauty. This is a quality which cannot be defined, any more than beauty in art can be defined, but which people who study mathematics have no difficulty in appreciating.

We can now see that we have to change the principle of simplicity into a principle of mathematical beauty...It often happens that the requirements of simplicity and beauty are the same, but where they clash, the latter must take precedence.

So strong was Dirac's belief in simplicity and beauty in nature that he declared, '...it is more important to have beauty in one's equations than to have them fit experiment....' Experiments, after all, are sometimes wrong! It is ironical that the theory that Dirac thought the ugliest and the most unsatisfactory in all of physics – quantum electrodynamics, which deals with the interaction of light with charged particles – happens to yield more accurate predictions than any other.

The most superficial study of physics begs the following question, to which there is no generally accepted answer: what is the reason for the uncanny effectiveness of mathematics, a creation of man, in providing a description of nature? Why are the laws of nature expressible in mathematical terms? Why did God write the book of nature (to quote Galileo) 'in the mathematical language (whose) symbols are triangles, circles and other geometrical figures, without whose help it is humanly impossible to comprehend a single word of it?'

Mathematics is not of itself a science, if by that term we mean the study of nature: rather, its province is to derive the

logical consequences of axioms which are held as self-evident or given.

Because the laws which lie at the foundations of mathematics are *constant* (in contrast to the laws of physics, which rest on observations and which are subject to change as the observations or theories improve), mathematical laws are *inviolable*. If the Theorem of Pythagoras was true for Euclidean space in 500 B C., then it is true for such spaces for all time.

In the early years of this century, the German mathematician David Hilbert launched a programme to axiomatise all of mathematics: to discover, if possible, a set of axioms together with a set of rules of applicability, given which all of the propositions of mathematics would logically follow. There was also the hope that it might be possible to show that mathematics contains no logical contradictions. That programme was given a body blow by Kurt Gödel, who proved, in effect: given any finite consistent set of axioms that includes arithmetic, it is possible to make statements that are neither provable nor disprovable by the use of those axioms. That is, if there are axioms at the foundations of mathematics, they must be infinite in number.

However, a finite number of postulates does not imply that it is possible to deduce contradictory propositions on the basis of those postulates. This caveat is important because it is easy to show that if in a system both a proposition and its contra are simultaneously true, then *every* proposition that can be stated in the language – no matter how nonsensical – can be proved. *Prima facie*, this seems untenable, and thereby hangs an amusing tale. McTaggart is said to have asked Russell, 'If twice two is five, how can you prove that I am the Pope?' Russell answered, 'If twice 2 is 5, then $4 = 5$. Subtract 3; then $1 = 2$. But McTaggart and the Pope are two; therefore McTaggart and the Pope are one.'⁵

3 Cited in S Chandrasekhar, *Truth and Beauty, Aesthetics and Motivations in Science* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1987

4 Quoted in John D Barrow, *The World Within the World* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988

5 Jeffreys attributes this argument to G H Hardy. I think erroneously Sir Harold Jeffreys, *Scientific Inference* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973

From lawless drift to rule-based management

M B ATHREYA

FOR nearly two centuries after the onset of the industrial revolution, management had not been conceptualised as a profession, with its own laws and rules. A precursor of the idea of management was the concept of 'administration'. An early work, *Generale et Industrielle Administration*, originally written around 1870 in French by Henri Fayol, arising from the writer's personal experience, became a classic.¹ In the early years of this century, a second stream was concerned with the engineering aspects of factory production. Frederick W. Taylor's² was a pioneering attempt at creating concepts of work organization and management. It contained his ideas on division of work, specialisation, planning, implementation, coordination, the functional organization and the role of the foreman.

A closer look at rules for raising work efficiency came from the Gilbreths,³ who in the 1920s developed the early techniques of time and motion study. Laws in management, as in other fields, have developed through experience, trial and error and reactions to excessive swings of the pendulum in either direction, on any given spectrum.

Around the 1930s, the pendulum of extracting more efficiency through physical models of work-load, rest pauses, sequence of operations, lighting, heating and so on, was felt to have gone too far. There was a reaction from social and behavioural scientists, looking at industrial management. The studies of Mayo,⁴

Roethlisberger⁵ and others (at the Western Electric factory in Hawthorne, USA and elsewhere), stressed the human variables of the individual personality, group norms, supervisory leadership behaviour and similar factors. This facilitated the borrowing of insights from sociology, such as alienation, stressed by Marx,⁶ and anomie by Durkheim.⁷ A behavioural approach to labour management issues had been propounded by Follet⁸ in the 1920s, but, perhaps, a bit ahead of her times.

The Second World War required the allied military forces to optimise the use of limited human and material resources. This led to the application of mathematical, statistical and systems analysis techniques to decisions on resource mix, allocation, utilization, audit and reallocation, giving rise to a more numerate set of laws in management, broadly known as Operations Research or Quantitative Methods. It included concepts like Linear Programming (Dantzig),⁹ Game Theory (Von Neuman),¹⁰ Bayesian Decision Theory (Raiffa)¹¹ and many others.

The long period of peace and trade between 1946-1995 has seen the integration and synthesis of these and newer areas, such as management

1 Henri Fayol, *General and Industrial Administration* London, Pitman, 1967 (several editions)

2 Frederick W. Taylor, *Scientific Management* New York, Harpers, 1912 (and many later editions).

3 Frank B. Gilbreth and M. Lillian, *Applied Motion Study* New York, 1917 (many editions)

4 Elton Mayo, *The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilization* Harvard Business School, 1945

5 Fritz J. Roethlisberger and W. J. Dickson, *Management and the Worker* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1939

6 Karl Marx, *Das Capital* Modern Library Edition.

7 Emil Durkheim, *Anomie*. Rome

8 Mary Parker Follet, *Creative Experience* New York, 1924

9 George Dantzig, *Linear Programming and Extensions* Wiley, New York, 1964

10 J. Von Neuman and Oscar Morgenstern, *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* Princeton, 1944

11 Howard Raiffa, *Analysis for Decisions* Harvard Business School, Cambridge, 1967

issues of MNCs (Vernon),¹² cross-cultural experiences of Japan (Morita),¹³ quality (Juran),¹⁴ customer orientation (Drucker),¹⁵ and empowerment (Peters).¹⁶

Management laws and rules are understandably different both from physical laws and those of formal legislation by governments, constantly evolving in response to practice in the global market environment. We have attempted to capture here the current state of thought and practice. The laws are integrated in the form of a Cybernetic Management Model in Figure 1. The key theme is one of learning from feedback for continuous refinement of management laws and rules.

Stakeholders and Expectations: With the fall of communism and return to the market, governments and people are placing greater reliance on business enterprises, autonomous institutions and NGOs. Will these institutions become the new tools of oppression and exploitation? How can we ensure their legitimacy? For whom does the bell toll? The emerging management law is that a firm exists to meet the expectations of a variety of groups, together called 'stakeholders' and rules within this broad law indicate the relative priorities of the stakeholders:

1. The customer/beneficiary comes first. The purpose of business is to create and sustain a customer (Drucker). It is the customer who pays salaries and wages. The employer only handles the money (Iacocca).
2. Enhancing shareholder value enables the firm to attract capital for growth.
3. Sustaining employee dignity, self-worth, skills, morale and motivation is essential for customer satisfaction and profitability.

4. Building a sense of partnership with dealers and vendors.

5. Earning and keeping the trust of banks, financial institutions and lenders and depositors.

6. Exercising social responsibility in a variety of manifestations—ecology, safety net and good corporate citizen.

Multiple Objectives: Profit maximization cannot be the sole objective of business. Similarly, efficiency maximization cannot be the sole objective of NGOs and government delivery systems. Efficiency and profitability are important, but have their place. The totality of stakeholders' expectations seem to require that all institutions have to keep in mind the following five objectives, recognising complementarity as well as conflict at the margin. These are:

i) **Mission:** Clarity on the institution's role in the economy, society, nation, region and the world. The choice of theatres of operation, target customers/beneficiaries; chosen products/services to be offered.

ii) **Growth:** Leaderships of enterprises and NGOs are on trial. Can they grow fast enough to meet the stakeholder expectations for products, services, jobs, amenities, access and entitlements? The rule is to grow or be marginalised.

iii) **Efficiency/Profitability:** Any mission, however exciting, worthwhile or sacred, does not justify inefficiency. In fact, one can reach larger numbers of the target population only by deploying resources in the most efficient manner. For businesses, profits will have to come from internal efficiency, productivity and cost reduction, as competition will tend to stress value for money.

iv) **Image:** Institutions are organic, human entities. People will form perceptions, which will affect transactions positively and negatively. So, there is a need to build an internal and external track record and reputation for quality, service, delivery and innovation.

v) **Vitality:** The quality of entrepreneurship and management is judged by enduring, long-term success, and the ability of the institution to weather changes and discontinuities in several parameters—demand, technology, resource access, legal framework and competition. So, the

leadership at any given time has to build in research, systems and human resources development processes for performance not only now, but in the secular, long-term future.

Goals: The observance of each set of management rules has produced some results and given rise to newer issues, necessitating another set of additional rules. As top managements became aware of the law of objectives, there was a period of clarity and improvement in performance. This, however, was short-lived and new questions regarding growth and profit soon cropped up. The next set of rules evolved about setting goals on each of the above objectives. A 'goal' has one or more of three dimensions: time frame; quantification, and cost-benefit trade off.

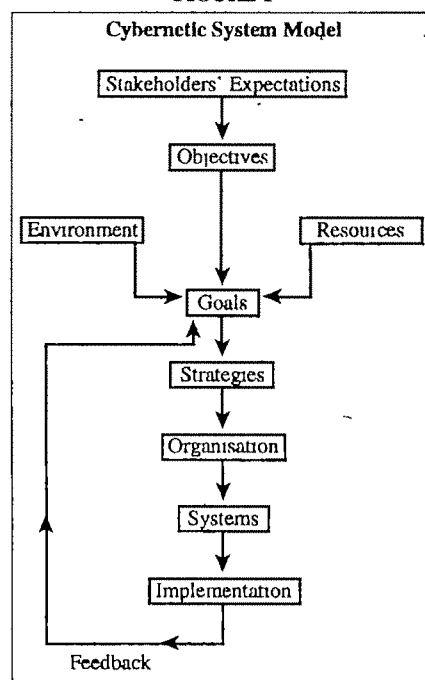
All these dimensions should be defined, wherever possible.

(i) Mission accomplishment has to be related to at least a time dimension. This is part of the Vision 2000, or similar long-term visioning exercises.

(ii) Growth has to be quantified in terms of volume, mix, price, sales turnover, and market shares in different products, segments and territories.

(iii) Efficiency and profitability require the highest and most detailed level of goal

FIGURE 1



12 Raymond Vernon, *Managing the Multinational Corporation*. Harvard Business School, 1968.

13 Akio Morita, *Made in Japan*. Harper, New York, 1990.

14 J M Juran (ed.), *Quality Control Handbook*. (3rd ed.), New York, McGraw-Hill, 1974.

15 Peter Drucker, *Management—Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*. Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1975.

16 Tom Peters, *Liberation Management*. Harper and Row, New York, 1992.

specificity: Unit cost of machines, materials and labour; Profit margin percentage on sales; Asset turnover ratio; Return on capital employed and on equity.

(iv) Even an intangible objective like image is now subject to the rules of goal setting. Periodic attitude surveys can be conducted to measure satisfaction of customers, dealers, vendors, employees and shareholders and further goals set.

(v) Similarly, another intangible like vitality is measured through investments in research, modernization, computerisation, systems, culture building, training and development.

Environment: One area of apparent arbitrariness in management had been the question of who sets the goals and how? The answers to these questions have serious implications for the chances of achieving the goals. For example, if the goals were seen as that of the owner or chief executive or a small group of top executives, there was a tendency for alienation, lack of understanding, commitment or even sabotage by the rest of the organization. In response to such experiences, two broad laws have evolved: firstly, goals should be based on data and shared perceptions, not on whims and fancies; and secondly, such data and perceptions are required on two major sets of inputs – the environment and resources.

Now we deal with rules relating to the environment, followed by those pertaining to resources.

In scanning the *environment* for goal setting, the following dimensions need attention:

- (i) Demand-Supply scenarios.
- (ii) Technology scenarios with respect to product, process, materials, packaging, transportation, information and other relevant technologies.
- (iii) Regulatory scenarios – central government, state, local, bilateral and multi-lateral.

For each of these sub-environments, there are further detailed sub-rules and guidelines in management.

Resources: One of the basic laws of management is that in a competitive global environment, better resource man-

agement is a source of sustainable competitive advantage. The three important rules of resource management are:

- (i) Better and better utilisation of already existing resources.
- (ii) Internal generation of resources by innovation, improvements, re-engineering, training, learning curve, etc
- (iii) Mobilisation of additional resources from the factor markets.

These rules are applicable with respect to all types of resources. Here again, experience is helping management to evolve the following rules and priorities:

(a) It is perhaps most critical to manage human resources well. There are several sub-rules, such as:

- It is a resource, capable of self-management.
- It is the one resource capable of appreciation, and not subject to inevitable depreciation with time.
- Human potential is always under-utilised.
- Communication, consultation and participation tend to raise motivation and involvement.

(b) There are a number of sub-rules on the management of financial resources:

- Long run market capitalisation is the best measure of financial performance.
- Every employee has a cost-benefit impact on the firm and is not profit/loss neutral.
- There is a cost for every type of capital, equity, reserves or debt. The cost may be explicit or implicit, but it is always there.

(c) Similar rules on physical resources are:

- Better management of physical resources has to begin at the project phase.
- The aim of management is to strive for optimality in project time, cost and quality.
- Post-commissioning, the actual costs of materials, labour, energy, and overheads must be brought closer to standard costs.
- Further, the standards themselves should be continuously challenged and reduced.

Strategies: One of the most important laws in management is that steady long run strategic management is more effective than the most brilliant tactical and crisis

management. The development of the laws of strategy was driven by the realization that while awareness of objectives and clarity of goals did help, the results did not approach the goals. The basic laws of business strategy have also benefited from the laws of military warfare, industrial economics and game theory.

(i) Strategy is the optimal match between the opportunities in the external environment and the distinctive competencies of the firm.

(ii) Strategy must be a blend not only of opportunities and resources, but also values of the members of the organisation.

(iii) Further in a liberalised economic regime, business strategy should also have an element of social responsibility, in terms of contribution to employment, exports, indigenisation, ecology, etc.

(iv) Overall corporate strategy must strike a balance between the risks of being an unwieldy conglomerate, at one extreme, and a single product vulnerability, at the other. Concepts like core competence, focus and diversification have to be applied with an appropriate blend.

Besides overall corporate strategy, a number of laws and rules have evolved on each Functional Strategy. Some examples are:

* Marketing Strategy has to blend the elements of product, price, distribution, advertising, promotion, research, credit and service.

* In Financial Strategy, there is need for an optimal mix of debt and equity, long-term and short-term funds; multi-currency funds; retained and new funds.

* Manufacturing Strategy has to optimise technology, scale, location and outsourcing

* Human Resources Strategy has to optimise employee relations, union relations, training, compensation and job satisfaction.

Organization: One of the most voluminous set of management laws and rules relate to how firms are to be organised and run. The core organizational law is that an effective organization has to be a balanced blend of three elements: Organizational Structure; Organi-

zational Processes; and Organizational Culture.

Each of these has a number of rules.

(a) An Optimal Structure has to be based on: environmental change; task complexity; technological demands; and people's profiles and aspirations.

(b) Organizational Structures tend to evolve on the following order, with growth and complexity: one man's shadow; functional, departmental structure; regional decentralization, divisionalisation; matrix and global.

(c) Organizational health depends on the health of the following processes: individual motivation; interpersonal relations; group dynamics; inter-group relations; boundary relations.

(d) Organizational culture is a resultant of the prevalent values, norms and attitudes towards elements such as: Work culture, including standards of punctuality, attendance, output, quality, safety and service; Initiative, without always waiting deferentially for instructions from above in a bureaucratic or feudal manner; Mutual trust, instead of a suspicious atmosphere of intrigue; Support by sharing resources and ideas, instead of building internal hoarding and black markets.

Systems: One of the later areas of codification in management has been the formation of laws and rules about systems. The delay was the result of two forces: the tendency of entrepreneurs and executives to act in a personalised style, ostensibly fast, sometimes in haste; and a perception that government departmental bureaucracies are riddled with time consuming systems.

The growth in size and complexity of business, as well as the advances in computers and information processing have led to a much wider acceptance of systems laws and rules.

(i) All institutions need three basic kinds of systems: Planning and Decision systems; Monitoring and Control systems, Information systems to feed both the above planning and control processes.

(ii) As they grow in size, they need these systems in depth in each Functional area: Marketing/Delivery to beneficiaries;

Materials/Inputs; Operations/Conversion/Value addition/Quality; Financial and Accounting; Personnel Payroll, Appraisal, Training.

(iii) At a further stage of growth, business needs the above systems for five different timespans: short-term scheduling; annual budgeting; project concept to commissioning network; 3 to 5 year strategic plan, 10 year plus perspective plan.

The effectiveness of the above complex grid of systems is governed by further laws:

(a) System acceptance and effectiveness improve with the participation of the user in system design.

(b) All systems need periodic audit and update.

(c) System discipline is relatively more important than formats and sophistication

Implementation: In the early periods of lawless drift, managements were mostly preoccupied with implementation. That did not make for effective implementation. Frustration with the miscarriage of implementation led to some of the important laws of management:

(i) Take time off from the activity trap of excessive anxiety about implementation to work on advance planning.

(ii) Do the planning systematically, even if it appears to delay the start of implementation, because that apparent lost time will be more than made up in the time saved in smooth implementation.

(iii) Involve the middle and lower formations of the organization at the appropriate components of planning. Take the implementor's views on: stakeholders' expectations and perceptions; environmental trends of demand, supply, customer and competition; existing pattern of resource utilization, generation and mobilisation and future needs; The level of stretch in the goals; adequacies and gaps in existing strategies and strategic alternatives; organizational strengths and weaknesses in structure, processes and culture; and suggestions for improvement; system benefits, gaps and requirements.

(iv) Do not command implementation. Support implementation by visibility, access and support; being a personal

example of sustained action and transformational leadership

Feedback: Management laws and rules grew in value as managements moved from the folly and luxury of untested assumptions. The assumptions were often unconscious, such as that the owner or chief executive and his coterie knew what was good for the stakeholders; their own personal objectives and goals were also that of the organization; that either the environment is crystal clear or unpredictable; that resource efficiency is not critical since costs can be passed on in price increases; strategic plans reduce opportunistic manoeuvrability; systems are bureaucratic; subordinates are not fit for delegation, etc. The damage done by these assumptions has gradually led to a spirit of learning

A basic law of feedback in management today is that a learning organization has the best chance of competitive success. A variety of rules have emerged

(i) Feedback should be obtained on actual performance on all parameters and compared against the goals; variances calculated, analysed and corrective action taken.

(ii) Sensitivity to external and internal feedback should be increased. Early signals should be picked up for timely response.

(iii) Recognising that individuals and organizations tend to be defensive to negative feedback, all members should be trained to: giving feedback in an acceptable manner; receiving feedback non-defensively, seeking feedback, putting the giver at ease, perceiving unspoken feedback through observation and sensitivity to non-verbal signals.

Management is one of the oldest professions and, at the same time, one of the newest disciplines. Its laws and rules are still being enriched. But the corpus of management laws and rules appear already sufficient to apply to human affairs universally, including:

*Societal management;

*Institutional management; and

*Self-management.

The ten step model demonstrated above and its laws and rules can be applied at all these three levels

Rules of academia

DINESH MOHAN

PROFESSOR Amar G. Bose of the Bose speakers fame was recently in India. In one of his public lectures he mentioned that when he finished his doctorate at MIT in Boston he was offered a faculty position in the same institution without applying for it. This information was given to him at the swimming pool by one of the professors from MIT. The Indian audience of academics was highly impressed by the 'lack of red tape' at the MIT. In discussions after the lecture, this example was used to point out the ills of academic culture in our institutions: 'We don't have this freedom and that is why our institutions cannot be world class.' But the fact is that if any director or vice-chancellor of an Indian institution appointed someone without the formality of an application and an interview, the same individuals who extol the virtues of that system would go to town alleging nepotism or political interference. This shows the confusion that exists in the intellectual community in India regarding rules and norms.

Bose was an undergraduate and post-graduate student at MIT and worked with some of the most famous professors there. His capabilities and accomplishments were well-known. In all probability the faculty of the department met and formally decided that Bose would be a good catch for the MIT before the decision was communicated to him. After all, it is not easy to maintain a reputation of a top class institution unless you can locate the 'best' talent and entice them to join your institution. This compulsion sets up its own rules and norms. Rules and norms which are more difficult to violate than those printed on paper in the absence of systemic guidelines and compulsions.

When we discuss the role or absence of norms and rules in the academic and research institutions in India we are tempted to blame our 'culture', 'political interference', and 'corruption'. It is fashionable to talk about the lack

of a 'scientific temper' in our society. It doesn't matter that no one knows what 'scientific temper' really means. Most are unaware that the phrase is purely indigenous in origin and that no one outside India uses it. The invention of the phrase is attributed to Jawaharlal Nehru and it has also been introduced into the Constitution of India.¹ Those who want to promote a scientific temper among Indians assume that our society is backward and must become more like western societies who have developed a 'scientific way of thinking': a legacy of *orientalism* which postulates that western Protestant societies are inherently more logical and scientific and eastern societies more spiritual. It is the same sense of inferiority and helplessness which then promotes the need for finding explanations in 'cultural' sources rather than the dynamics of current societal problems.

This is nothing new. When the earliest universities and technical institutions were established in colonial India they were meant only for *training*. It was assumed that no research would be done in these institutions since oriental societies were not capable of original scientific work. Research departments were not to be set up in colleges and universities. If any research had to be undertaken, it was to be in the relevant government departments (eg. the Geological Survey of India) for the benefit of the Empire. Therefore, there was no need for universities to have rules and norms which one associates with an academic culture. In the government departments involved in scientific work, the rules established had to be the same as those for any other colonial civil servant. There were exceptions mainly because many Indian scientists, inspired by the freedom movement or by contact with European scientists, set up research groups in universities. The Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore

¹ Section 51a, *The Constitution of India*.

was also established in reaction to the anti-academic conditions prevalent in universities at that time.

This state of affairs continued until India became a Republic. It is only in the 1950s and 1960s that new institutions were set up and old institutions were given the role of academic research. However, most of the colonial rules were not jettisoned. For example, many of our research and academic institutions still have the following conduct rule in their statute books:

No employee shall, in any radio broadcast or in any document published anonymously or in his own name or in the name of any other person or in any communication to the press or any public utterance, make any statement of fact or opinion –

(i) which has the effect of an adverse criticism of any current or recent policy or action of the institute; or

(ii) which is capable of embarrassing the relations between the institute and the Central Government or any State Government or any other institution, organisation or members of the public.

This indicates that the role of research and intellectual pursuits in newly independent India was not really understood by society in general and policy-makers in particular. These intellectual activities were still thought to be completely subservient to the 'development' policies of the state. However, some academics in elite institutions in India managed to carve out a special niche for themselves as outstanding researchers by world standards. The resulting prominence and power in society emboldened them to talk about rules and norms conforming to some international concepts of how academic institutions function. They now demand more autonomy and freedom. More freedom to spend money as they like, more freedom to earn money as they like, and more freedom to work as they like.

This has not been easy in coming. There is no consensus. There are few indigenous role-models to follow. There are few success stories which have shown sustainability. A large number of efforts have been sub-critical and have wasted

money. As a result, public opinion has slowly turned suspicious of academic enterprise. Researchers are increasingly seen as 'armchair intellectuals' with little relevance to society. Academic institutions are largely perceived as training grounds for industrial and government jobs. The current demands of liberalisation are also forcing academic institutions to start looking upon themselves as factories. All this before our institutions could find their feet on the ground and define their role in society.

This is not surprising. Institution-building is not easy and takes a long time. We must remember that many of the famous universities of Europe had existed for centuries before the Taj Mahal was built in India. They have evolved and grown with the societies they were part of. By and large they have also responded to actual societal needs and grown in relative harmony with their surroundings. They have been democratised as society itself opened up. They have learned to understand their roles and duties in society and developed norms accordingly. An academically elite institution need not have the same norms as a small community college. The different norms are allowed to exist because society also understands and accepts the different roles. When the behaviour of an institution becomes completely at variance with its expected role, there are convulsions and new norms developed or modified.

When we look at the functioning of these European or American institutions and compare them with ours, we find the behaviour of our faculty and administrators less than desirable. We think of our colleagues as unscientific at best and corrupt at worst. But these comparisons are point comparisons and a-historical. We are only looking at the institutions outside as they are today and not how they evolved. It is easy to attribute our patterns of behaviour to religion and culture, for it provides us with an excuse for inaction. By definition, then, change can only be brought about by moral and religious leaders and we can wait until there is a change in the 'character of the people'. We escape

our responsibility to initiate changes in systems which influence people's behaviour.

It is my belief that norms and rules are adhered to if the participants at large see benefits accruing. When the various roles an institution must perform become clearer, it will be easier for their constituents to define responsibilities and set up norms which suit them. But they must also see benefit in doing so. When large groups don't see tangible societal benefit emerging from their adherence to certain societal rules, then it is logical for them to shift to their patterns of behaviour to those ensuring personal benefit alone.

Listed below are a few of the situations in question. These involve rules and norms that the academic community and decision-makers intuitively feel and wish to follow, but don't:

- * Appointment of vice-chancellors and directors.
- * Selection to various faculty positions
- * Taking teaching responsibilities seriously.
- * Maintaining honesty in research work.
- * Maintenance of high academic standards in research and teaching
- * Working in cohesive groups and teamwork.
- * Cooperating with unit or department heads.

This is just a representative listing. I have purposely not included those situations which have mainly to do with administrative rules (leave, punctuality, and so on). Many claim that norms are not observed in a majority of situations and institutions and therefore the fault must lie with our inherent character or culture. But it is also true that norms *are* observed to a greater degree in some institutions than others, in some departments more than others in the same institution, and in the same department during some periods than in others. It is possible, then, that the environment and the system may be the determining variables, and culture the confounding one.

Whenever norms are not followed, I believe it is because there is no pressing

need to do so. The real problem lies in the neglect of pre-university education. In a clever manoeuvre in social engineering the upper castes and classes of India (UCCIs) have reserved the best education for themselves through three strategies – non-acceptance of compulsory neighbourhood schooling systems, continuing English medium education in schools, and subsidising private schools directly and indirectly. The UCCIs have ensured that only a very small percentage of children reach the university stage and a large percentage of those who do so are inadequately trained.

At the same time, a disproportionate amount of money continues to be allocated to higher education. Therefore, until recently, there were enough seats in ‘good colleges’ for anyone passing through ‘good schools’. This suited the UCCIs quite well. Because of the schooling system, the few academically elite institutions were reserved for their intelligent children, and the socially elite institutions and capitation-fee colleges for the less bright children. Since UCCIs have tremendous social clout their wards would get good jobs anyway after graduation, irrespective of their academic achievement. But it didn’t do much for maintaining standards in the institutions. There is no societal pressure for them to perform well. There is no need for academic ranking of these institutions for them to compete with each other. The academically elite institutions are so few in number that they don’t have to do anything to attract bright students. The socially elite institutions and capitation-fee colleges do not exist for academic excellence.

In such an atmosphere, there is no objective reason for most institutions to follow any norms. It does not really matter whether you have a good academic vice-chancellor: an army general or an IAS officer could do a good job of maintaining peace. There is no real need to choose the best faculty because quality of teaching does not influence success in job availability. Since these institutions have to mostly deal with UCCIs, their problems are confounded because UCCIs

are important people and they exert undue pressures on the management. The only places which escape some of these problems are the super-elite institutions like the IITs, IIMs, some colleges and departments in universities.

The academically elite institutions have escaped some of these problems as they are few in number and able to attract a reasonably good faculty. Because the students are outstanding, good work gets done due to the personal interest and self-image of the faculty and students. It is surprising that they have survived in the absence of a societal demand for good quality: it is as if these institutions are on auto-pilot. In the absence of real demand there is a limit to self-monitoring for maintaining quality and norms and rules are sometimes violated, but such violations do not affect the reputation or threaten the existence of the institutions.

It is believed that violations of norms and rules are very common in the institutions attended by the lower caste and class Indians (LCCIs). These are the non-elite colleges and schools in the cities and small towns of India. The machinations of the UCCIs have ensured that LCCIs do not get a good school education. This means that most avenues of upward mobility through a good college education are also denied to the LCCIs. The LCCIs have learned through experience that the only route of upward mobility open to them is through politics and/or crime. However, the system of electoral democracy has helped them get into some decision-making and money-making positions. They have always known the importance of higher education and hence their demands for degree colleges in each taluka town. But their children who enter these colleges have had an inferior school education and indifferent teachers. They pose no threat to the children of the UCCIs. Hence the demand for reservations in jobs. Even the bright children of LCCIs end up attending bad schools and bad colleges. However, because they are very bright, they find ways of getting ahead through whatever means at their disposal. One

of these is to take jobs as teachers in local colleges and then move into politics. It is not surprising then that so many of these colleges are very politicised at the level of both student and teacher. In such a situation it would be silly of us to expect academic norms and rules to be observed in these institutions.

The above discussion shows that it is difficult for our academic institutions and research laboratories to observe the stated norms and rules because the societal concerns are at variance with the theoretical objectives of these institutions. By and large, the societal demands are linked with the *societal status* of the institution and not its academic standards. In the absence of strong academic demands, the institutions are forced to bend to the other concerns of the society at large.

The problems of these institutions are not primarily based on our ‘culture’ or primarily influenced by our dominant religions. Their situation has more to do with the class structure of our institutions and the class interests of the segments of society they serve. The current moves to further ‘privatise’ these institutions is likely to make the situation worse if these institutions become even more class specific.

Academic and intellectual institutions must play academic and intellectual roles in society for them to function according to some accepted rules and norms. If their de facto roles are different, then their de facto norms also get modified. If a so-called academically elite institution ends up admitting only relatively rich students, then it is natural for it to end up functioning more like a finishing school.

If we want academic norms and rules to be observed in our institutions then we must democratise them. This will mean moving toward the concept of compulsory education in neighbourhood schools, use of Indian languages as the medium of instruction in *all* schools, free education in all institutions including universities, living stipends for poor students, and an expansion of the number of institutions at all levels. Any takers?

Squaring the circle

VASUDHA DHAGAMWAR

IT IS generally agreed that law is an evil because it restricts one's freedom. At the same time it is a *necessary* evil because lawlessness is even more restrictive of the weak. Might becomes right. To reverse the process we need law. A good legal system is perceived as the best way to minimise the evils of law and authority. It balances, as perfectly as possible, the rival claims of freedom and control. It has the perfection of a circle for it is the same seen from any angle. At the foundation of such a system is the principle of the Rule of Law. This can be best comprehended by describing its opposite, rule by personal whimsy.

In India, we have a soft corner for rule by personal whimsy. Legendary rulers are remembered for their quick and fair delivery of justice. Many of them were able administrators, and the subjects were secure and content under their wing. By contrast, the tortuous process of delivery of justice in democracy does not please at all. What is forgotten in this nostalgia for the past, however, is that for one such good ruler people had to suffer scores of vacillating, unjust and tyrannical kings who ruled by personal whimsy and made the lives of their subjects utterly miserable and insecure. Unlimited power in the hands of one man did more harm than good.

Rule by personal whimsy was the prerogative of dictators and kings whose word was law and which could change faster than quicksilver. Their subjects never knew whether they would be punished or rewarded. Indeed, if one person was rewarded, the fate of the next may well have been punishment for doing the

very same thing. There was no knowing what could happen. Proverbs reflected this uncertain state of affairs. 'Where can one complain against the king, the rains, and one's parents,' lamented one such Marathi saying.

The rule of law is characterised by all that rule by personal whimsy lacks. It has certainty, universality and before it all are equal, not excluding the state itself. Certainty of law means that everyone should know, or be able to ascertain, the consequences of his action, even in advance. Universality of law means that the law applies to everyone regardless of who they are. Equality before the law means that all are treated as equals before the law. Universality and equality before the law are, in a sense, two ways of looking at the same proposition.

Most important of all, rule of law means that no one is above the law, not even the sovereign or the state.

The modern criminal legal system is based on the bed-rock of *mens rea* or guilty mind. There must have been an intention to commit the act in question with knowledge of its consequences. Based on this principle, children too young to comprehend the consequences of their actions are not held responsible and are not liable for punishment. With few other exceptions, whoever is proved to have had *mens rea* will be punished alike by the law. This is as true of criminal law as it is of civil law.¹

In the past and perhaps even today, criminal law favours the strong and super-

¹ The examples are mainly from criminal law but the argument can also be illustrated from civil law.

rior because they are of a dominant race, religion, caste or of the male gender, when the victim is of a subordinated race, religion, caste or a woman.

If there are too many exceptions in any law, and especially if each exception is treated differently, the law fails to have certainty. If too many questions are asked to identify the victim and the offender in terms of their race, religion, caste, creed, gender, then the law becomes confusing and uncertain.

Under the comparatively newer principle of positive discrimination, special privileges are afforded to the weak in civil law, whatever the reasons for their 'weakness'. It may be race, gender, caste, minority status, physical or mental disadvantages. When this principle is used to excess, it threatens the rule of law because the law becomes difficult to ascertain.

Every element of uncertainty in the law contributes to an erosion of its universality of application and this in turn dilutes the principle of equality before the law.

Rule of law is distinct from rule by personal whimsy because it is above everyone, including the state. The state cannot take away the citizen's rights in disregard of the law. On the contrary, the state is bound by its own laws and cannot act as it pleases in breach of them. Obviously, the use of law by the state has to be as far removed from arbitrariness as possible.

The doctrine of due process comes from this need to control and prevent arbitrary or even summary use of the law by the state. It imposes a negative obligation on the state not to deprive anyone of their life, liberty or property without satisfying the specified procedure. This great doctrine is also embodied in our Constitution. Article 21 of the Constitution states: 'No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.'

For most scholars, lawyers and judges the understanding of the rule of law is that it is certain, universal and subject to due process. It upholds equality before the law of sovereign and subject alike. It is a creature of procedure. Nothing is stated at all about the content of

the laws over which the rule of law presides. Yet, the rule of law is supposed to be the best guarantee of substantive justice and of protection against rule by personal whimsy

This leads us to a curious situation where it is possible to ask if rule of law can be unjust. It leads to an even more curious situation where the answer is a clear affirmative. This has happened in the not so distant past. Let us take two examples, of the Third Reich under Hitler and of India during the Emergency.

In 1933 the NSDAP (National Socialist Workers Party of Germany) was returned to power after elections. In consequence, Adolf Hitler assumed power. He suspended the Weimar Constitution and rarely remembered the legislature. He ruled by diktat. During the Third Reich, it was lawful to persecute and kill, even decimate the non-Aryan races. Amongst them perished hundreds and thousands of Gypsies and the Jewish people

The Indian Constitution was drafted by the Constituent Assembly and adopted by the people of India on 26 January 1950. This Constitution empowered the President (actually the Prime Minister in Cabinet) to suspend fundamental rights in a national emergency. During 1975-77, when emergency was proclaimed, the full chapter on fundamental rights was suspended.

The rules were there for all to see. In both countries they permitted the state to treat citizens like subjects and worse. This was because even the universally certain law, applied with due process, had to be applied for human behaviour to be declared unlawful or criminal by the state. Due process itself had to be defined. The rules under which (the Constitution) and the institution through which (the legislature) the state had to decide what kind of behaviour was punishable, were themselves either suspended or rendered powerless. Due process was also suspended.

Rule of law, as defined above, and most meticulously applied could result in a situation which was clearly unjust. Thus, there was nothing in it which, per se, prevented the German state from requiring all

Jews to wear the yellow star of David on their arm bands or chest. Nor was there anything in the Indian Constitution which prevented the government from imposing compulsory sterilization as a terminal method of population control, once the Emergency was proclaimed. It was the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's son Sanjay who was largely responsible for this situation and exercised unimaginable powers for which he had not the slightest authority under the Constitution

Indeed, there was nothing, down the ages, to prevent discrimination by the state on the grounds of race, religion, caste, gender or place of birth. The Shudras could be forbidden, on pain of death, to cast their shadow on Brahmins or other upper castes. The Kafir's testimony could be rejected outright and the evidence of a woman witness given half the weightage of a man's testimony. Maiming, starving, chastising and even killing a slave could well fit into the law of the land, and a whole people declared enemies of the state

We were faced with this situation during the Emergency, when around 150,000 people were imprisoned for indefinite periods under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), at the pleasure of the state. Young boys and girls were arrested for sporting badges with Gandhiji's message 'Nirbhay bano' - Be fearless. The power of summary arrest was arbitrarily exercised at least in the interior areas. The law, or lack of it, was used to settle personal scores. Many political prisoners were permanently disabled and some died in custody.

Yet, when a citizen approached the Supreme Court challenging the state's right to deprive a citizen of his life or personal liberty without due process, the Court held that after the suspension of fundamental rights there was no Article 21 and there were no fundamental rights. He had no remedy left.

Did that mean that the state could take away one's life without due process of law?

Somewhat bleakly, in a full bench judgment, the Supreme Court held that

the government could do just that. But, said the apex Court with piteous wistfulness, 'we have a diamond hard, diamond bright hope that they will not do so.' (ADM Jabalpur vs. Shukla, AIR 1976 SC 1206).

The judgment in *ADM Jabalpur* surely flew in the face of its earlier judgment in *Keshavanand Bharati* (AIR 1973 SC 1461), in which the Supreme Court held that Parliament could not amend the basic structure of the Constitution, not even by following the process for amendment laid down in that august document. It could perhaps only be done by another Constituent Assembly. The Court had not thought of including Fundamental Rights in the basic structure.

In this case they were pronouncing on the Supreme Court's power of judicial review. One could appreciate that thinking on certain rights, like the right to property, is undergoing ideological and practical changes and therefore may not be included in the basic structure. However, that cannot apply to the concept of fundamental rights and certainly not to the right to life. But when the entire chapter on fundamental rights was hijacked by the executive, the Supreme Court felt helpless to stop it. Due process stood in its way. As classic a case of being hoist with one's own petard as one can find.

A similar situation arose during the Third Reich. A large number of Germans, many of them government servants, some of them in the armed forces or the diplomatic service were appalled by what their government was doing. At a very real risk to their lives they tried to persuade governments in Britain, Europe and the U.S.A., that Hitler's regime was committing unbelievable crimes against humanity. Outraged statesmen told them that they were committing treason against a lawfully elected government.

In the cases cited, due process shut the door in the face of human rights refugees. Rule of law proved to be a perfect instrument for subverting itself and for introducing rule by personal whimsy. Perfect because it was above challenge by the same rules. A circle or a sphere may

be perfect, but it can be tipped or rolled over with little effort.

There was a second set of answers. One answer was within the peculiar powers of the Holy Roman Church. That was to absolve its faithful from the duty of obedience to the German state, from the obligation to render unto Caesar what belonged to him. Pope Pius XII did not take recourse to this little used extraordinary right because, it is said, he considered communist Russia to be a greater enemy of the Church than Germany and wanted to take no steps that would benefit Communism. It is said that Hitler's advisers were really worried about the Pope using this power.

During the Nuremberg trials, the Commission, formed by the representatives of allied governments, was faced with prisoners of war who had, as servants of the Third Reich, committed untold crimes against humanity. But when German officers, one after another, said that they had only obeyed orders, the Commission could not stomach this response. They fell back on natural justice, which is said to exist over and outside human laws. The Commission held that no officer could use this as an excuse for violating human rights. One lone Indian voice dissented on the ground that officers were bound by oath to obey their superiors' orders. There was no such thing as natural justice.

Similarly, during the Emergency Jai Prakash Narayan exhorted us not to obey the state if it ordered us to act against our conscience. For the same reason some Germans made abortive attempts on the life of Hitler and were executed for treason.

All three situations were an attempt to combat evil law (but law nonetheless) with no law as we understand it. Conscience is peculiar to every individual. My conscience may let me do many things which yours will not permit or vice versa. My conscience may also be timid, fearful, peace at any costs type, or just plain cowardly. In other words, conscience is not a definitive test. Let us not forget that there were people who actually approved of genocide.

Natural justice is not easy to separate from divine law, which in turn is moving too close to fundamentalism for comfort. But all three of them are too rigid, and against any kind of change. What we have grown accustomed to regard as unjust to women or to groups which are race, religion, or caste specific, is built into the systems of natural justice. Natural law, from which natural justice derives, is put at par with the laws of physics or chemistry, totally beyond altering. The adoption of such a system of divine law or natural law as the state law, is seen to explain discrimination against women and religious or racial minorities.

None of the solutions so far devised have been more than ad hoc attempts to stop an unjust or tyrannical state in its tracks. They are weak, inadequate and sometimes tautological. They do not serve the purpose because they do not build the content of the laws into rule of law. This is necessary. We have to locate our challenge to the lawless state within the hard core concept of rule of law.

The only occasion when we did not accept a procedural defence was in the case of apartheid in South Africa. The racist state of South Africa was implacably ostracised with every political and commercial weapon we could muster. It was declared to be a lawless state despite the fact that it had a government which was elected and took power under the Constitution. This was the only time that content was built into the rule of law. The perfect circle of the rule of law was made, as it were, into a square or a cube with a firm base from which it could not be toppled.

The rule of law cannot merely be a matter of form, structure or procedure. It is essentially a means of securing substantive justice.

In one of the Negro spirituals Joan Baez sang in the 1960s, a calf is being taken to market for slaughter. Above the calf is a free-wheeling swallow to whom it wails and asks why it must die. The farmer shuts him up.

Stop complaining, said the farmer
Who told you a calf to be?

4

All the creatures that love their freedom
Like the swallow have learnt to fly.

Calves never will fly, so far as empirical truths can be averred with such certainty. But all the same they have a right to ask: why we? Why even all calves? Why should any law have the sanctity of the rule of law so long as it says all calves (universality) shall be slaughtered (certainty) if they are found to be of a particular weight, age and state of health and the market situation so demands (due process)?

But we do say words to the same effect to our girl children, *Ladki ki jaat*, and others too.

At a meeting last year, post-Babri masjid, a young Muslim historian was understandably bitter and feeling insecure. At the same time, he was outraged at being asked about the situation of the minorities in Pakistan. He replied with commendable control over his true feelings that he was an Indian citizen and the situation in Karachi was of no more interest to him than the weather in that city. It was a Islamic state whereas India was a secular country.

This sort of a reply may be a discussion-stopper for the moment but it does not really satisfy, for what it is really saying is that my freedom lies in the Indian state being a secular democracy. Another person may feel that it lies in India being a socialist republic or one that guarantees rights of women or tribal peoples or whatever. That does not matter. The argument really is that the Indian Constitution has a certain structure and format, and therein lie my rights. If another state does not have that structure, its people cannot have those rights. Communists have used this argument with some success to defend their freedom of speech in non-communist countries.

But what if India had become a totalitarian state, a dictatorship of the masses? What if the Emergency had not been lifted? What if India becomes a theocratic state? What if an emergency is reimposed? In the future, can a government in India be allowed to subvert the rule of law with the assistance of the rule of law?

Alternately, are natural justice and conscience our only stick to ward off such danger? Are these the only challenges to or weapons against fundamentalist states anywhere in the world? Or against totalitarian states? This author does not agree.

I have argued here that the content of law is an integral part of the rule of law. Any legal provision that takes away from the citizen's liberty and leaves her no constitutional weapon to fight with is not justified or protected by the rule of law. Nor does it guarantee equality before the law because the state is not subject to the same law as those it governs. Such equality is not the equality of being imprisoned and enslaved or even killed indiscriminately. Equality before the law means equal protection even against, and particularly against, the state. If the state does not uphold this principle it has betrayed rule of law and has, at this point, imposed rule by personal whimsy. The resultant state of affairs no longer minimises the evils of control by authority, one of the prime responsibilities of the rule of law.

If the state uses its physical might, the citizens can do very little but fall back on their conscience and conspiracies. But the judiciary, the ultimate guardian of the Constitution and of citizens, has a duty it cannot shrug off with platitudes. It must state, loudly and clearly, that no government may suspend fundamental rights in a wholesale manner. If it does, the government itself will be outside the pale of law. Let us not forget that the Supreme Court has yet to right the wrong they did us in *ADM Jabalpur*.

Similarly, if a state other than our own is subverting the rule of law, we have at least to admit the fact, even if we are powerless to do anything about it. No one has the right to tell the citizens of a state which has abandoned the rule of law that it is treason for them to complain, let alone act against it as they can.

A process of putting content into rule of law, into governance as acceptable to the concourse of nations, is already underway. Starting with the ILOs conventions in the 1930s to protect labour across

the world, various U.N. agencies are drafting declarations, conventions and charters to protect the rights of several groups – women, children, indigenous people, even the environment.

These instruments focus upon recognition and protection of substantive rights of their target groups. Many governments that have acceded to these instruments – including our own – see no contradiction between doing so and leaving our internal legal system unchanged. But there is a logical contradiction here. It is our duty as citizens, and of the legislature and judiciary to resolve this contradiction. Content of the law is clearly part of rule of law. We must work towards making this principle a reality, even if it seems akin to cutting the Gordian knot rather than undoing it.

When all else fails citizens do fall back on their fragile strengths. When a people withdraw their mandate from a tyrannical state, by whatever means they can use, the state collapses, as it did in Eastern Europe, and even in Soviet Russia. But it was a long time coming and inflicted untold suffering on the people. Alternatively, as in the case of Germany, there has to be an all out war by external forces, who of course only take up arms in their own self-interest. In either case, it is a very expensive, extra-judicial, extra-constitutional method of righting the wrongs. Expensive because it can usher in anarchy and lawlessness, the terrible companions of rule by personal whimsy. Once the goal has been achieved, the work to restore the law has to begin anew.

The rule of law is an instrument of justice. It is perhaps the best protection we have against a powerful state. Content of the laws has to be a part of it. It cannot be all procedure. A system cannot be described as being based on the rule of law if it legalises denial of justice and withdrawal of the protection of law to its citizens. The rule of law is not meant as a sop to deny us our rights; on the contrary, it is meant to *guarantee* our rights. We must re-interpret this principle if we are not to be betrayed into losing our rights yet again in the future.

Contradictory pulls in China

GIRI DESHINGKAR

THE progress-minded among us have been led to believe that the rule of law is a great civilizing gift bestowed by the West on all others. Most Chinese do not think so. The word 'law' (*fa* in Chinese) has almost always had a negative, pejorative connotation except when used as a Buddhist term, in which case it means *dharma*. The Chinese binary opposite of law is *dao* (the Way). The Way is ordained by Heaven; it is the natural order of things, humans, societies. In contrast, law is man-made; it is an artifact of human will, usually that of a ruler. The Way recognizes that rulers are different from the subjects, morally self-cultivated gentlemen (*junzi*) are quite different from the commoners and men are different from women as are children from adults. They all have their roles to play in the cosmic and therefore social design. The Way is bound by its context: in fact, the Way is its own context.

Rules are a completely different matter. The Chinese language has a large number of words (*lu*, *guei*, *xian* for example) which mean codes, regulations, rules and so on, depending on the context in which they are used. They ensure convenience, predictability, order but these regulations never had any transcen-

dental sanctity. They were just useful and no more. Very often, these were no more than precedents handed down by virtuous kings, sages, ministers. A ruler could depart from precedents for compelling reasons which had to be acceptable to the ministers. Similarly, an official could bend the rules if his moral conscience told him to do so.

Chinese magistrates, the lowest level of centrally appointed officials, were never trained in law, rules, regulations; they were trained only in Confucian ethical principles. They ruled over a large slice of the population with only half-a-dozen or so assistants (called *yamen* runners). They picked up rules, mostly precedents, evolved by their predecessors, on the job. They were appointed to govern communities which were largely self-governed by clan-elders and members of the local gentry. 'Law and order' was maintained by the *baojia* system in which one locally appointed person was responsible for maintaining order among five households on either side of his own house. Clan-elders and *baojia* chiefs ordinarily settled most disputes by themselves. Only major crimes like murder, banditry were taken to the magistrates for judicial verdict.

The question of adopting context-free law was settled as early as Third Century B.C. in China. Before that the Confucian School and the Legalist Schools had been contenders for ideological supremacy. The Confucians (Confucius and Mencius) believed that human nature was basically good but that it could become contaminated by evil external influences or through ignorance. Rulers must nurture the innate goodness of human beings by encouragement and remove ignorance through education.

The Legalists (Han Fei Zi and Shang Yang) believed that human nature was basically evil. Rulers must therefore deal with subjects through reward and punishment in the proportion of one to ten, a small reward for good behaviour and draconian punishment for bad. Everyone, according to them, was equal before the law of reward and punishment. The Legalists were the 'Chanakyas' of the Kingdom of Qin. Their policies made the Qin kingdom progressively strong until it conquered all the other kingdoms in China establishing the first Chinese empire.

But the rule of the First Emperor (Qin Shi Huang Di) did not last beyond a couple of decades. The law which had produced a prosperous economy and a strong army – it also produced a standardized script, a uniform axle for carts and a system of radial roads – was seen as unjust, not conforming to the Heavenly Way. It was strictly enforced through a non-hereditary bureaucracy especially created for that purpose. Rebellions soon broke out and the Qin dynasty was overthrown.

The succeeding Han dynasty could have continued the legal system established by the Qin but it chose to turn its back on it. The Confucian system was restored but minus its feudal component. The empire was now ruled through a bureaucracy which had internalized Confucian values. That system came to be known as State Confucianism; it has left its mark on Chinese notions of governance which continue even today under the rule of the Communist Party of China.

Chinese imperial history which lasted for more than 2000 years with some

interruptions provides evidence that a complex society could be governed without context-free law. Rule by context-bound law was never questioned, even by anti-dynastic rebels. The rebels, at different points in Chinese history, resisted rule by unjust persons but they did not reject the rule of persons per se. If they succeeded in the rebellion and overthrew the old dynasty, they established rule by new persons, who were presumably more just and righteous than the old rulers.

But even righteous persons did not rule arbitrarily or whimsically. In this sense, imperial China may be said to have practised 'rule by law'. But it was not 'rule of law'. There were codes/rules by which the conduct of rulers, including that of the emperors, was judged; the Imperial Censor had the right to admonish the Emperor for wrong-doing. Some Imperial Censors were forced to commit suicide because they were too critical of a despotic emperor. But the institution of Imperial Censorate survived despite occasional imperial despotism. Even in the case of despotic emperors, they always feared what the Imperial History Office was writing about them for, by tradition they had no access to the History Office.

For a history-conscious culture, what posterity thought about oneself was an effective constraint. By way of illustration, the last Emperor of the Ming dynasty – which was well-known for imperial despotism – committed suicide in 1644 after leaving behind an abject Imperial Edict apologizing for his failure to be a worthy ruler.

The Chinese people have been brought up to believe that if the ruler has the 'Mandate of Heaven', then his acts in the process of ruling are righteous. If, however, he persists in unrighteous acts, it means that Heaven has withdrawn its Mandate and the subjects have a right, indeed an obligation, to overthrow him. The 'revolution' of 1911 which overthrew the last imperial dynasty of the Manchus (Qing) justified itself with this belief and the overthrow of the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek in 1949 by the Chinese Communists was accepted by the Chinese

people as a change of the 'Mandate of Heaven' (*geming*).

Rules can be transparent without treating everyone equally. This was well-recognized in imperial China. For example, the 'Superior Man' (literati and gentry) did not suffer corporeal punishment (*xing*), the common man (*xiaoren*) did. There is no historical evidence to show that the common people struggled against such unequal treatment. This may be because it was also common knowledge that officials (and other gentry) were required to commit suicide for wrongdoing, at the very least they were exiled to faraway places.

Even at the mundane level of traffic rules (on imperial roads and canals), these were gradually worked out by cart-pullers and boatmen. They did not need sanction by officials. Practicality and convenience were the important factors. Even taxation was context-bound; in famine-stricken provinces taxation was waived and corvée was imposed only where large public works were undertaken. And, of course, conscription into the army was resorted to only in the event of war or a large-scale rebellion and that too only in areas affected by war or rebellion.

It has been said by socio-morphologists that since Chinese society did not have a notion of 'law', Chinese science did not look for Laws of Nature as the Europeans did. The Chinese did, of course, observe regularity and patterns in nature but these were not considered immutable. If a planet deviated from what was believed to be its pattern of motion, the astronomers often shrugged their shoulders stating that: 'Sometimes Heavens also go astray'. Other branches of Chinese science, such as medicine and geomancy were entirely context-bound; diagnosis and treatment depended on the individual and architecture depended largely on the location.

Even in as important a matter as succession to the imperial throne, there was no rule of primogeniture. Tradition permitted a ruler to select a successor from among his sons. Yet, such was the respect for traditional codes that rarely in Chinese

history was there an attempt to usurp the throne by the other brothers as often happened during the Mughal rule in India. Even the established precedent of only males succeeding to the imperial throne was not sacrosanct. Empress Wu of the Tang dynasty occupied the throne and was actually called 'Emperor' to distinguish her from being simply the emperor's wife. But her reign was not popular and thereafter, imperial succession was confined to male heirs by an unwritten rule.

Law is often considered indispensable for orderly political competition and for smooth transactions in commerce. As for political competition, there was none in imperial China. All ministers were senior officials who had risen through the Imperial Civil Service Examination System. Political competition among them was strictly discouraged. The Chinese word for political party is *dang* which also means a clique or a faction, a pejorative term. Even the examinees in the civil service examinations were not treated equally. Somewhat like our 'reservations' policy, China privileged candidates from educationally backward provinces. As for commerce, both domestic and external transactions multiplied after the 10th century but the absence of laws governing such transactions does not appear to have been an impediment to growth in trade. Commercial guilds evolved their own rules and procedures with little governmental interference.

One can go on in this vein to make the point that a highly complex society like China was more than reasonably governed, for the most part, only by context-bound rules. The important factor was that it was ruled by purposively self-cultivated men who imbibed a set of righteous values. Even the emperor was not above acting according to those values.

The idea of a republican form of government was a foreign import into China and with it came the cognate notions of constitutionalism, popular legislature, context-free law and regulations. Opinion-makers in China had come to the conclusion that the West could

repeatedly defeat China not only because it had better weapons but due to a system of governance which produced superior national character. Other than overthrowing the imperial dynasty in favour of a republic, all other ideas only remained on paper. Soon China was split into fiefdoms ruled over by totally autocratic warlords who observed no law, no codes, not even informal ones. And they were no cultivated gentlemen.

Warlordism came to an end only with the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1949. Before that the Communists had ruled over some parts of China but in those 'liberated areas' they operated only with informal codes and Party discipline, both very humanely applied, the exact opposite of warlord rule in the other areas. That accounted for their popularity.

After coming to power, the CPC proclaimed the Common Programme which was a kind of quasi-Constitution. The first proper Constitution was proclaimed in 1954 but it was a short and terse document. China still had no body of laws which derived from it. In proclaiming the Constitution, the CPC was merely following the Soviet precedent. Constitution or no Constitution, what went for law was no more than Party policy and the Party's notion of discipline extended to the people at large.

During the 'three-antis, five antis' (*sanfan wufan*) movement of the early 1950s, hastily put-together 'people's courts' 'tried' absentee landlords, 'reactionaries', 'counter-revolutionary elements' and when found 'guilty', sentenced them to death on the spot. Party policy of the time and mass-campaigns took the place of law and this was acknowledged in so many words. Party policy was, in any case, determined by high CPC officials and often the CPC Chairman, Mao Zedong. Except for the people who were at the receiving end, a minority, the rest generally accepted the Party's dispensations since they were imbued with the traditional notion of 'rule by men'. CPC officials were taken to be virtuous persons

and their instructions and verdicts were legitimate in the eyes of the common people.

This state of affairs continued until the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when high CPC officials themselves came under fire from a faction within the CPC as well as groups of young Red Guards. 'Bombard the Party Headquarters', Mao had said, adding that 'it is righteous to rebel' (*zaofan you yi*). The latter, under the instigation of the former, dragged high Party officials out of their houses and offices, paraded them in the streets with accusatory placards around their necks and dunce caps on their heads and 'sentenced' them for their presumed 'crimes'. Liu Shaoqi, once China's Chief-of-State (President) was imprisoned and died in jail. Many others were driven to suicide. Deng Xiaoping was exiled to work on a farm. Many high leaders were persecuted and publicly humiliated. Prime Minister Zhou Enlai barely escaped persecution. It was a horrifying and traumatic experience not only for Party leaders but also for intellectuals in China who were classified as the 'Ninth Stinking Category of people'.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, in the eyes of a large number of high Party leaders, was the worst form of 'rule of man' (or woman since it was Mao's wife whose word was law), there was no redress against the momentary whims of the faction in power within the CPC. This is why, soon after Mao Zedong's death, several Party leaders who had suffered, managed to overthrow, through a palace coup, the 'Gang of Four' which ran the Cultural Revolution. After a couple of years of transition, Deng Xiaoping, who had suffered during the Cultural Revolution, assumed supreme power. It is then that the concept of the 'rule of law' began to look attractive to the new leaders. Earlier, the concept had been dismissed away simply as 'bourgeois propaganda' to make the socialist system look bad. Now it came to be looked upon as a shield against the Party's arbitrary policies in times of leadership change within the CPC.

Throughout the 1980s there was a wide-ranging debate on legal matters in the newly mushrooming publications on law. The hoary topic of 'rule of man' versus 'rule of law' was discussed threadbare. Other subjects like 'legal culture', 'legal consciousness', 'legalism', 'judicial independence' were also discussed by legal professionals

Apart from a political reaction to the arbitrariness of the Cultural Revolution, the second pressing reason for law-making was China's 'opening to the outside' world. Foreigners investing large sums of money or launching collaborative ventures wanted legal guarantees to protect their interests. The need was so urgent that China initially invited foreign legal experts to draw up *de novo* new sets of laws for China.

Law-making in China is leader-driven; there is no popular clamour for it. Such is the ignorance of law within the CPC itself that the Party started a countrywide campaign to educate Party and government cadres on law. However, one of the major obstacles is that due to laws having been made in quick succession during the last 15 years, people's understanding of the law lags way behind. Only lawyers, of whom there are some 85,000 today, partially understand what is going on in the field.

In line with Deng Xiaoping's concept of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' what may 'law with Chinese characteristics' look like in the future? I see an unending contention between Chinese cultural preferences for just governance and modern/western law-making. Despite the existence of laws on the statute book, most Chinese believe in the old saying: 'Good people do not engage in litigation and those who engage in litigation are not good people.' So, after the first flush of modern law-making, China is likely to produce a dialectical synthesis between morality, upheld and implemented by good men, and context-free impersonal law with an emphasis on the former. In fact, increasing American/western pressure on China in the matter of human rights as integral to the 'rule of law' may produce a Chinese backlash and hasten the return to traditional concepts.

Transitional systems

ANURADHA M CHENYOY

WHILE states and societies can be characterized by their rules and laws, it is axiomatic that constitutional principles and controls are important guarantees of democratic organizations. History has repeatedly shown that judicial/constitutional controls are a crucial constituent of a state based on the rule of law. The break-up of the 'Soviet type' (Soviet Union and East and Central Europe) of system has underlined this.

In the transition from the Soviet type system to the democratic-capitalist one, the effectiveness of the constitution in protecting democratic arrangements, providing general guidelines for ensuring public life and civil society, and legal mechanisms for safeguarding human rights and rule of law, will be the principal criterion for gauging the success of the transition.

How far have these transitional states succeeded in the task of reforming themselves into law abiding states? What were their past traditions? Has a political culture of the rule of law emerged? These are some of the issues addressed in this paper.

The idea that the government is subject to the law and constrained by it, was not an accepted norm in the Soviet Union when it was established in 1917. This was because of the belief that law and state would wither away in the transition to communism, and that political expediency, rather than laws, were necessary for

consolidating the workers' state. Hence Lenin's dictum: 'law is politics'.

Nonetheless, radical legal thinkers of Soviet jurisprudence like E.V. Pashukanis and N.V. Krylenko, developed a code for the new Soviet state. This was used in the 1936 Constitution.

Stalin strengthened the legal system to suit the period of socialist construction. The mandate for the new law-makers like A.I. Vyshinsky was to ensure 'stability of law'. With this it was not necessary to accept 'rule of law', since rule of law would have signified not only a reordering of priorities but also a change in the relationship between the legal system and the political order.¹

Socialist legality, as it evolved under Stalin, took on two dominant characteristics: one, that law could never become relatively autonomous of politics; that politics determined the rules of its operation through intervention in individual cases. And two, that the protection of the revolutionary state and society took precedence over protecting the rights of the individual.

These two characteristics led to distortions in the Soviet judicial system because individual rights were not adequately protected and civil society could not develop. The regime and the party leadership, as long as they were in power, were not subject to constitutional/judicial scrutiny for 'reasons of state'.

The judicial system was used as a political instrument to rid the regime of its factional opponents (for instance, the trials in the 1930s). Extra-constitutional law-enforcing bodies, like the NKVD and KGB, amassed power at the expense of the judicial agencies, the courts lost control over a large number of cases, and the office of the procurator-general whose task it was to ensure judicial supremacy, was unable to oversee judicial operations.

The post-Stalin period saw the restoration of law-enforcing agencies and removal of the centralised and arbitrary method of governance. Nonetheless,

even the restoration of the 'Leninist norms' could not effect major changes in the political structure. Political power continued to rest with a central authority. This power or authority could not be questioned, criticised or challenged from outside the top echelons of the party hierarchy.

Elements of pluralism introduced into the system in the post-Stalin years could not make any substantive structural changes. Though law-making now followed procedure and was carried out through specialist participation, law adjudication remained arbitrary. This structure marked all Soviet type systems. Civil societies were curbed to varying extent through East and Central Europe, and to a greater extent in the Soviet Union.

To rectify this anomaly, amongst others, was on Gorbachev's reform agenda. It was stated during the *perestroika* period, at the 19th Party Conference (June 1988) and explained in the official mouthpiece of the CPSU, Communist, that 'the USSR is being made into a law-governed state.' This meant, the journal continued, recognition of the freedom of the individual and society from unrestricted intervention of the state, supremacy of law over the state, recognition of independence of law courts, and democratic functioning of government bodies. In effect the 'the CPSU is resolutely rectifying the deformations in the development of socialism.'²

The complete delegitimisation of the Soviet system, and the excessively broad sweep of the reform without adequate alternate structures being created led, amongst other things, to the disintegration of the Soviet system. But have the transitional systems given these societies the rule-based systems necessary for a social order which ensures civil liberties and rational development? How far are the legacies of the past likely to constrain the new system? And will the new social policies facilitate the functioning of constitutional systems?

The transitional states and law: Constitutions embody the traditions, values and institutions of the revolutions/movements which establish them. The constitutional state guarantees the rule of law. Once the anti-statist revolutions of East and Central Europe were successful, and the transfer of power complete in the Soviet type systems, it became necessary to give legal expression to the new power structures

East and Central European scholars believe that these societies have to establish specific goals to manage a successful transition to constitutionalism: the generation of a market economy, the establishment of rule of law and the institution of democratic rule.³

The transitional systems in Russia, and East and Central Europe did not initiate constituent assemblies. The reasons for this include lack of faith in erstwhile written constitutions which had guaranteed civil liberties, but were never implemented. The sudden and quick nature of the break-up of the old systems created ad hoc political systems which suited the new elites in power. The ideology of nationalism or ethnic homogeneity got priority over the effort to construct a law-governed polity and a constitution.⁴

Changes in the political system were brought about by amendments and decrees to the old constitutions. Some analysts see this as an attempt by the new ruling elite to show that it acts as a 'constituted power'.⁵ There has been an absence of debate between the public and the political actors on the new laws which will shape these transitional societies.

3 Ulrich Preuss, 'The Politics of Constitution Making: Transforming Politics into Constitutions', *Law and Policy* 13(2), April 1991. Claus Offe, 'The Politics of Social Policy in East European Transitions: Antecedents, Agents and Agenda of Reform', *Social Research* 60(4), Winter 1993. Dezso Kovacs, 'The Human Face of Political, Economic, and Social Change in Eastern Europe', *East European Quarterly* 27(3), September 1993.

4 Ulrich Preuss, 'Constitution-Making and Nation-Building, Reflections on Political Transformations in East and West Europe', *European Journal of Philosophy*, April 1993.

5 Preuss, 'The Politics of Social Policy', *op cit*

1 Peter H. Solomon, *Soviet Criminologists and Criminal Policy* Macmillan, London, 1978, p. 26

2 Marat Baglai, 'A Law Governed State: From Conceiving the Idea to Implementing it' *Communist* (6), 1989

The growth of political and legal institutions in East and Central Europe and in other post-Soviet systems has been highly uneven. Linkages can be established which relate past regimes with the current political-institutional pattern. Thus, for instance, in Poland and Hungary, where institutional pluralism existed with authoritarian regimes and political change took place through negotiation and election, parliamentary democracies have taken root.

In East Germany, where a harsher regime resisted change, leading to mass upsurge and refugee movements, merger with the FRG has led to legal and constitutionally ordered political changes. Czechoslovakia's traditionally authoritarian leadership retreated after mass pressure. The ethnic split into two states, negotiated through a referendum and election, has led to a multi-party democracy

Bulgaria and Romania with a history of a totalitarian past, have changed to highly unstable democracies.⁶ The western republics of the Soviet Union function as unstable democracies because of their weak institutions, lack of stable political formations and emphasis on individual leaders, rather than on structures of governance.

Exhaustive debates on restructuring of legal codes and the judicial system have not taken place in most transitional societies. In Russia, the constitutional court, the supreme court and higher court of arbitration head a unified legal hierarchy. Yet, confrontation between federal and regional authorities are a regular feature because both want to control the judges under their jurisdiction.

The method of forming the judicial system is leading to disputes. The presidential authority has reserved the right to single-handedly form the entire judicial system. There is no federal law on the judicial system.⁷ Even the Ministry of Justice is unclear about these issues. The president has the power to interpret constitutional norms in his own way, unhindered by precedent or law.

6 Dezso Kovacs, *op.cit*
7 *Izvestia*, 25 August 1994

To date, whenever the Russian Constitutional Court has taken decisions which do not correspond to the interest of the president or different branches of power, it is subjected to criticism by the authority which the Constitutional Court has sought to curb.⁸ The Constitutional Court, like the Constitution, has political content, but its intermediary role in Russia was curbed when it sought to stop the unconstitutional attack on the parliament by President Yeltsin in October 1993.

The experience of the Constitutional Court in Russia is not dissimilar to its predecessor in Soviet times. When the Soviet Court showed its independence and declared that certain edicts of the executive authority did not conform to the Constitution, its role was reduced. This was evident through the Soviet period. This trend weakened the constitutional system of the country. The attempt at building a law-based system in Russia has not yet seriously begun.

In the comparatively stable systems of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, rhetoric about democracy overshadows reality. The only reforms that have been carried out with some urgency are those relating to privatization; but the legal structures necessary to complement modernization and ensure democratic culture remain far behind.

In all these systems, there is a widening gap between social groups and sharp, new class divisions are emerging. There are increased social tensions because of the massive re-division of state property. Ethnic nationalism and inter-community tensions mark all these systems. The former Yugoslavia's inability to resolve its ethnic disputes and the consequent destruction of all civil institutions is an extreme case.

Political leaders are aware of the negative impact of these changes. President Havel stated in June 1990 that 'economic reforms must be accompanied by a social system that safeguards human rights and prevents social upheaval' (by

8 *Segodnya*, 25 January 1995

protecting) those most likely to suffer in the transition.'

The new political elites on their part are exerting pressure on governments to lay down laws to suit the new capitalism. Governments in all these societies have set up new security police systems, not dissimilar to those of the past, and legislation has been passed in several of the states restricting the activities of workers' unions. Members of the old communist parties are discriminated against.⁹

All the transitional states have vested great authority in their presidents. Thus, policies which are pursued become personalised rather than sanctioned state policies. And the authority of laws and positions become personal, rather than systemic. This weakens the effective functioning of institutions and the process of institutionalisation itself.

The central problem of the transitional, post-Soviet systems is that a gap between democratic form and substance remains.¹⁰ The new elites in power are establishing laws and structures to maintain their own domination. The gradual emergence of pluralism and of capitalist market economy is leading individuals towards more atomised lives, removed from the state. This is resulting in the formation of civil society, but with its own set of problems.

In the post-Soviet systems, the encompassing control that the Soviet type state had on the legal sphere has been altered. It is accepted that rights cannot exist without the relative autonomy of the legal system. Yet, the new elite has not paid sufficient attention to building institutions which would safeguard legal, constitutional or even democratic norms. A legal or democratic political culture has not yet struck roots in these systems. The direction of their transition remains unclear.

9 A. Walicki, 'From Stalinism to Post-Communist Pluralism: The Case of Poland', *New Left Review*, January 1991. R. Burbach and S. Painter, 'Restoration in Czechoslovakia', *Monthly Review*, April 1991

10 Attila Agh, 'After Four Years: The General Situation in Hungary in 1994' Paper presented at the Indo-Hungarian Seminar, School of International Studies, JNU, 1995

On international law

V S MANI

LAW is an intrinsic part of the social process of interactions in a community and as part of such process intimately reflects the features and idiosyncrasies of that community. It corresponds to the level of integration of values generally shared in that community. While it may not play a decisive role in the shaping of community values, its main role is to help identify, consolidate, and promote these values.

The legal process thus helps a community in identifying its goal values and offers it a formal framework for action towards the realisation of these values. It provides the community with a technique to recognise and formalise these values in the shape of binding norms, principles and rules, and an institutional mechanism not only to implement this technique, but, more importantly, to promote action to bring the community closer to the realisation of these values.

While it is difficult to draw a boundary line between law and morality, both contribute to the identification and promotion of community values, their rules often overlapping. Formation of customary law of binding legal norms and rules is often founded on the norms of morality backed by usage and community sanction.

Both law and morality wield the stamp of legitimacy to be used as evidence of either social approbation or condemnation. Law, however, seeks to perform this function through formal norms, institutions and procedures, sanctified by the community, usually through a 'fundamental law', specifically adopted by it, postulating norms reflecting its commit-

ment to certain abiding goal values as well as determining how it should be governed towards achievement of these goal values. Whereas moral norms and institutions may, though not necessarily, be less formal, supported by the ultimate sanction of social ostracisation or non-participation (which can at times be more effective than the formal methods of sanction available for the legal process).

Also, being less formal, moral norms and principles may more easily evolve and change in time with the evolution and change which community values undergo over time, than the less flexible methods of evolution and change which the legal process has prescribed for itself. This indeed is a prime reason for the gaps between legal norms and their implementation.

Modern communities have organised themselves into nations and 'states'. Political scientists are not in agreement in explaining why and how the institution of state became necessary and came into existence, although it is logical to imagine that states came into existence for the protection of a community from external and internal conflicts. Their theories as to the origin of state have been responses to their varied perceptions of the needs of the community and the functions of a state, as they saw them with reference to contemporaneous society. These needs and state functions undergo change over time. Be that as it may, the state system is likely to stay for a long time, as it has served the basic community interest of self-preservation, preservation and promotion of the community's long acquired elements of social, political and cultural identity.

Besides the preservation of the community, a prime function of the modern state, it is suggested, is to promote and protect democracy, as democracy appears to be a form of government which can allow participation by the individual members of the community in governing themselves and seek the realization of the community values in a manner acceptable to them.

There are at least two basic practical problems with this perception. One, every community is rife with groups with competing interests and objectives. A group dominant at a point of time may seek to impose its perception of community values upon the rest of the community. In other words, a state or a government 'controlled' by the dominant group may not necessarily reflect or serve the real community values. Law in such a situation will be used by the dominant group to its advantage, and its role and function vary from the ideal. True, the inexorable logic of the political and social processes may throw up factors to influence the dominant group to moderate upon the assertion of their interests, although not always leading to consensual method of authoritative decision-making.

The twin concepts of sovereignty and independence have essentially evolved to attribute an artificial personality of a state to a community in order to serve its need for self-preservation. The mythical attributes of state are however, often manipulated by the dominant interest groups to subserve their interests, the dividing line between the state and the government often being blurred in actual functioning.

Operationally, sovereignty means the authority to govern a community, and independence the freedom to exercise all attributes of sovereignty within the community protected from external interference. Independence at once manifests both the positive element of self-determination of the community and the negative proscription of interference from other communities. Sovereignty symbolizes the relationship between the state and its people, i.e. the individuals in

the community. Independence symbolizes the freedom from interference from other communities so that a people may determine and pursue peaceably its community goals.

Ironical as it may seem, co-existence of sovereign communities highlights both independence and inter-dependence. Mutuality of benefits determines the scope and content of cooperation between sovereign communities, even while pursuing their often distinct and competitive individual self-interests. International law is principally founded on this web of inter-community relations. It intimately reflects the changes and breakdowns, highs and lows of the dynamics of these relations.

Like domestic law, international law too reflects the chasm between the ideal and the real. The ideal, based on a constant consensual process of authoritative decision-making; and the real, representing the aggressive assertion of the will of the dominant community or group of communities at any point of time, moderated, if at all, by its sensitivity to the will of others, or by its intrinsic and extrinsic limitations in realisation of its will.

Yet, this apparent similarity between the international and domestic legal processes notwithstanding, there are significant differences between them. The most important of these is the decentralised system of international relations. The domestic legal order is clearly pyramidal in terms of both the normative as well as the institutionalised structure. Whereas the international legal order is more amorphous in terms of the level of identifiability and integration of the international community values.

To say this does not necessarily imply any value preference to the national system of law, each system of law necessarily corresponding to the level of value integration in the sort of community it seeks to serve. Nor does it assume that the domestic legal orders of the various national communities are identical in terms of their norms and institutional structure, or even in terms of the level of

identification and integration of community values.

The decentralised state of the international community is symbolised by independent or autonomous units called states. The legislative, the executive and the judicial functions of the international legal order are retained by the states. Ideally, this situation proffers them an opportunity to behave like 'civilized' entities by identifying and conforming to the general will of the international community, and discriminating their Real Wills from Individual Wills *a la* Rousseau. This would prompt them to evolve a just legal order whose norms could be readily identifiable and easily enforceable (enforcement being automatic even without the need for a special institutional mechanism for the purpose).

The reality, however, is far short of the ideal. If men were all angels there would be no need for law. The international relations appear to partake of many features of the Hobbsean state of nature, with international life tending to become 'solitary, nasty, brutish and short.' It is an irony that communities who have established 'civilized' domestic legal orders should display barbarism in their mutual relations.

This is due to the acute disparity in the distribution of power, and economic and social well-being in international society. Also, the myth of a sovereign state permits the blurring of the distinction between the Real Will and the Individual Will of a national community as seen by the dominant group. Indeed, the insularity of sovereignty corresponds to the position which a state enjoys in the world power process. Additionally, the emergence and maturing of new, powerful transnational non-state actors such as the Transnational Corporations, have made a further dent into the traditional security sought to be provided by the chastity belt of sovereignty. The not so powerful international institutions (both intergovernmental and non-governmental) have helped broadening of international community values, even highlighting the increasing porosity of state sovereignty

on matters like human rights, individual responsibility for international crimes and environmental protection.

The model of domestic legal order may not be ideal for the actual or preferred world order in view of the global goal values such as the prohibition of force, the achievement of economic and social distributive justice, and the protection of the global environment. The domestic legal order, however, has had the advantage of stability and clarity of norms and institutional mechanisms to facilitate continual participation of the national community in making and executing laws and applying them to specific situations of human conduct. The regime of norms and institutions is endowed with constitutive power to render authoritative judgments on intra-community relations.

On the contrary, the international community is typified by the pronounced absence of a generally acceptable decision-maker 'to move the argument beyond the adversary stage to the stage of authoritative judgment' (Richard Falk 1970). The state is at once the law-maker, law enforcer, law adjudicator, and law complier. This, in fact, is the reason why questions are raised, even from enlightened quarters, pointing to the indeterminacy of the legal status of international law.

It has been pointed out that the indeterminacy of the legal status of international law is perhaps most pronounced in the area of prohibition or control of violence in international relations. While violence is not peculiar to the international society, it is argued that it is unique in international relations because every time it erupts, it sends shock waves far and wide to such an extent that the very fabric of international law appears fragile, if not non-existent (Stanley Hoffmann 1968). This phenomenon, however, corresponds to the nature of international society in which the number of primary members (states) is small, they are readily identified, and their wherewithal for causing violence is phenomenal, with no world community mechanism to control violence, to effectively intercede on behalf

of the international community, or to adjudicate upon the claims that underlay the resort to unilateral use of force.

Additionally, the absence of a disinterested, and acceptable authoritative decision-maker makes it extremely difficult to distinguish between a valid exercise of the right of self-defence (the right of private defence in domestic law) and a wanton show of force in pursuit of an illegitimate or a doubtful claim.

This is not to say that no beginnings have been made in these areas. Since the Peace of Westphalia, 1648, as a result of a variety of historical forces, the process of international organisation has given shape to global international institutions like the United Nations. While many of these institutions have high-sounding names, they remain dimly distant cousins of their apparent counterparts in domestic societies. Yet they provide convenient fora and mechanisms whereby the members of the international community are persuaded frequently to assemble, discuss on the basis of mutuality of benefit and identify international policies, evolve norms and rules of conduct (often persuaded by the possible sanction of non-participation as is with IMF, World Bank, ICAO, ITU, or UPU).

Despite the seemingly formalistic outlook of these institutions, their contribution to the growth of international law in terms of treaty law and international customary law has been significant. No wonder that the International Court of Justice has not hesitated to grant its judicial imprimatur on certain consensual resolutions of the UN General Assembly as evidence of *opinio juris* (psychological element) of international customary law principles (see the *Nicaragua case*, 1986). The international institutions have also been instrumental in clarifying the pyramidal structure of international legal order e.g. the concepts of *jus cogens* in the law of treaties and the 1970 Friendly Relations Declaration.

The perceptions and descriptions of international law have varied from the Hobbesian state of nature, 'a vanishing point of jurisprudence', 'a weak law',

'a primitive law' to a binding system of rule of law. These perceptions and descriptions correspond to the preferred perceptions of the international community. However, it is submitted that every human society has a legal order of its own, closely reflecting its on-going efforts to identify and integrate its goal values over time. While enforcement is important to determine the effectiveness of a legal order, it is not a determinant of the jural character of that order, it is rather indicative of the sociological problems of implementation of norms. The 'weak law' label is accordingly dismissed. International law is not a 'primitive' legal system because the national communities of which states are constituted are anything but 'primitive'. It is indeed a binding system of a rule of law even if seemingly incomplete, a *sui generis* legal order intimately reflecting the complex and unique features of the international society it seeks to serve.

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Learning law outside law school

ABHA SINGHAL JOSHI

A MAN on being arrested by the police, was told, 'Anything you say now will be held against you in a court of law.' The man promptly replied, 'Sophia Loren.'

While this can be laughed off as a witty mind's saucy concoction, legal history recorded and unrecorded, is replete with less amusing stories of hapless humans who have been at the wrong end of the baton of laws and rules. Ignorance of the law is no excuse and every minute hundreds of people are wound up into the intricate web of laws and rules without a notion of what they are all about.

In today's largely democratic system of governance, a presumption is raised about laws being 'for the people' and 'by the people'. This leads us to the next presumption that 'the people' know what laws are being made, and when made, what they are all about. However, as is obvious from innumerable telling examples, this logical nexus does not exist.

In a country like India, given the combination of the factors of a large geographical area, a multilingual population, two sets of legislatures and the lack of literacy and political will, there is an abysmal lack of basic legal awareness. In the popular mind, it is a colonial hangover that laws are only suppressive in nature and relate to the police, courts and situations of animosity and conflict. Thus one finds oneself faced with reactions (even from the urban educated class) like - 'Oh you're a lawyer - we'll come to you if we commit a murder or want a divorce!'

To rural India, even the second classification does not exist. In the course of many legal literacy workshops conducted by MARG, we repeatedly came across the conviction among the rural masses that law had nothing to do with an ordinary person. The *daroga* (policeman) and the *katchehri* (court) symbolised

the law in toto. There is, in fact, no concept of laws being a part of our lives, as something which pervades our existence and to which practically every activity however mundane, ultimately relates. Even lower is the awareness that law can bring about empowerment and social change by putting positive pressures and liabilities on groups of people - as has been done with labour and other social welfare legislations.

The aim of legal literacy is thus clear: an awareness-generation exercise at a very basic level, in order to allow people access to information which would integrate into their existence, whether as spouse, child, parent, employee, accused, buyer or seller of property, and enable them to make decisions which not only conform to the laws of the land, but also facilitate a better quality of life.

Legal literacy is not for teaching the niceties of law, nor to show the way to the nearest courthouse. It is to enable people to have a choice where there was none before. Take the case of a group of women in a small town of Uttar Pradesh, who traditionally worked as bonded labour. These people are accustomed to taking loans from the landlord for marriages and death ceremonies. Since they have no source of income besides their labour, which brings in just about enough to keep body and soul together, they cannot repay the principal amount, leave alone the interest which keeps increasing.

These women, on learning about the law against bonded labour, told us that since their whole existence was tied up with co-existing with the *kamiya* (landlord), they were unlikely to take recourse to the legal procedures for getting out of bondage. However, the knowledge that a certain offence was being committed by

the exploiter, fortified their basic feeling that injustice was being done to them.

Likewise, an illiterate and very disgruntled woman in Bihar, after discovering that she had a right to ask her husband for maintenance even though he had married again and had children from the second 'wife', was incredulous at learning that in fact she was the legitimate heir of her husband's property, even if she had no children. She said, '*Ab hum apna haq zaroor maangenge.*' (I will certainly claim my rights now.)

However, it is an absolute necessity to impress upon the recipient of the information that getting one's *haq* (right) is not always quite so simple. The equation most often doesn't work out to 'ask and you shall receive.' While making this aspect clear, one must also stress that the value or effectiveness of legal literacy cannot be gauged in terms of situations won. On the overall canvas of a growing society, every legitimate demand for the enforcement of a law itself adds to making the picture richer.

The aim of a legal literacy campaign is not to encourage people to go in for litigation, but to increase empowerment and to encourage growth of social norms which are universal and conform to the present ideal of justice. The other aspect is to impress upon people the need to conform to certain given norms whether they like it or not, as these are norms universally applicable to all and are for the benefit of all. That such norms exist and can be made to work, is by itself a revelation to most people.

A certain group of workers who had recently learnt of the law of workmen's compensation, discovered the efficacy of an enforceable norm when a fellow workman's hand was injured. They insisted on the contractor paying compensation to the injured workman. As was expected, the contractor's response was incredulous – What compensation? Why? Who says compensation must be given? Confronted with their legal literacy booklet, the contractor was forced to pay an unprecedented sum of Rs 250 to the injured worker.

In many other situations, especially where the person at whose mercy somebody's rights are, is also in a position of power – such as the police – the perpetrator of the wrong or the withholder of the benefit himself does not know that such a law or rule exists. Very often it is seen that behind the hue and cry of police inaction is a very simple reason: they simply don't know what is to be done. Consider the case of the Bombay lawyer who on going to file a complaint of a dowry demand from her prospective in-laws, was told that no case could be registered since she was unmarried and there had been no *maar peet* (violence). They obviously knew only about Section 498A of the IPC which relates to matrimonial violence (whether dowry related or otherwise) and had no idea about the Dowry Prohibition Act which has been in force since 1961! So it is not only the illiterate and disadvantaged who need legal literacy, but also various sections of society who are dealing with the public.

While the police do go through a basic course in various laws and procedures during their training, what is really required is a sensitisation to the concept of law, to the rule of law and to human rights. This is now being done at some of the police training schools in the country and is likely to become a major programme in the coming years.

Legal literacy involves not only familiarising the people with various laws and their provisions, but also breaking down barriers of preconceived notions and socio-cultural conditioning. For instance, the majority of trainees at the Delhi Police Training School insisted that rape was a much hyped-up crime and that accusations of rape were resorted to when an amorous relationship was 'found out'.

This was a situation where just telling the police trainees how to register a complaint of rape had no meaning. They would obviously substitute their own assessment of the situation for the complainants grievance and refuse to lodge an FIR, which does happen in most cases. Here, we had to resort to a very basic exercise of breaking down the thought bar-

riers by examining their doubts about such things happening. We questioned them about child rape: can a child consent to such an act? Is such consent acceptable even if given? How about other pressures besides physical violence perpetrated on a woman?

This was accompanied by an exercise of putting the police trainees in the victim's shoes, in order to realise the gravity of the offence. One example we tried was to ask them, if after eating a huge amount of a favourite sweet they would be willing to eat more on being pressed by someone. How would they feel, if after refusing, the person caught hold of them and forcibly kept stuffing more into their mouths. This drew some laughter, but the point began to dawn on them. These exercises are also interspersed with questions like: 'Why can't you eat some more?' To which they responded, '*Hamaari marzi*' (our wish). That is the crux of the matter – *marzi* – and everyone, whether man or woman, is entitled to their *marzi* in certain matters.

Since legal literacy is an awareness campaign for the lay masses, and those masses are largely unlettered, how is a subject as complicated and shrouded in mystery as law to be taught? Legal literacy in its early stages was fraught with the problem of not being able to de-jargonise the law to meet the needs of the target group. We found practising lawyers not the happiest choice for conducting legal literacy workshops, for they have a distinct tendency to presume that a person who has never even read a book, knows what a *dhaara* (section), *Samvidhaan* (Constitution), *saakshi* (witness), affidavit, application etc. mean. In fact, they often recite sections and go away, leaving behind a totally befogged and bemused audience.

The resource persons conducting a legal literacy session are reminiscent of the Dodo in Alice in Wonderland who says, 'I move that the meeting adjourn for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies....' To which the Eaglet snaps, 'Speak English! I don't know the meaning of half those long words, and, what's more, I don't believe you do either!'

In the past few years, the focus has been on making legal literacy user-friendly, to remove from law the legalese and pomposity of the law books and law courts. The methodology now used is a combination of simple and visually attractive written materials, audio-visual media and the personal interaction of the resource persons.

A legal literacy workshop needs to start with the 'basics of the basics', which means that since we are there to talk about law, we must first ascertain if the audience knows what the term means and implies. This is done by exercises such as getting each participant to write down their idea of law on a piece of paper which is passed around. Those who are unable to write, speak out their views which are also written down. The various reactions which range from 'Law is police' or 'Law is no good: it only lands people in trouble', or 'It is a law for every married woman to put sindoor', are then taken up and discussed. At the core of the discussion one finds the basic essentials of law – that it is fixed, it must be followed by everyone, that non-compliance can result in sanctions, and though many social norms become laws, there is a difference between social rules and legal rules and the latter supersede the former.

The next exercise is to explain who makes the laws and how, as well as who makes the law-maker. It consists of explaining the process of forming the government, elections, democracy. This is not a mere textbook exercise in civics. It involves understanding the basic value system that our laws and government are based on – understanding that the Constitution is the basic law of the land and all laws and legal actions must conform to the Constitution. Also, seeing the law as a process of which they are a part, enables them to look at the laws critically and ask questions like, 'Is this law right?' 'Is this law just?' and 'Does this law need to be changed?'

Several women, after learning of the personal laws (pertaining to marriage and inheritance) of Hindus, Muslims and Christians actually made a comparative

analysis and asked indignantly, 'Why can't there be one law for all of us?' 'Yeh farq kyon hai?' (Why does this difference exist?) This, not from students at a law college or in a seminar of legal brains, but from semi-literate and some illiterate earthy persons whose prime concerns are to do with collecting water, fuelwood, bringing up children with minimum food and nutrition, while bearing the brunt of various forms of domestic violence.

The question of the subject matter of legal literacy is of some importance. Since there are laws and laws, which ones should be taught first? 'Street Law' as it is called in the West should be geared to enabling the man on the street (very often, somewhat deprecatingly called 'the common man') to know his basic rights and liabilities. It would, therefore, include a working knowledge of the law relating to marriage, divorce, property, crimes, torts and of great significance today, consumer laws – in short, basic laws which would enable people to understand, evaluate and perhaps even resolve everyday legal problems.

Legal literacy for a specific group may require inputs of a slightly different kind. For this, one needs to know a little about the target group – the nature of their social set-up, their employment and any other specific problem. A rule of thumb while holding legal literacy workshops with women is to start with the law of marriage and divorce and move onto property rights and succession.

While in some groups one encounters total wonder at even a basic rule that a woman can buy, sell, own and manage property, there are others where a lot of excitement is generated by the information that it is as illegal and as much of an offence to beat one's wife as it is to beat a man on the street. The knowledge that wrongs cannot be done under cover of matrimony and family is a revelation to most women. And also to some men.

A classic remark came from a man attending one of our workshops: 'Iska mutlab hai hamari wife ka koi guardian nahin hai? Usko phull azaadi hai? Woh

jab chaahe bazaar ja sakti hai?' (Does this mean that my wife has no guardian? She has full freedom? She can go to the market anytime she wants?)

Another popular subject is rights qua the police: that police must also follow certain rules while making arrests and dealing with citizens. We did a session on arrests at a legal literacy workshop with the women inmates of Tihar Jail, in which each person was asked to describe the manner of his/her arrest. To our utter horror we found that not a single one out of a score odd arrests, had been made according to the law! While most had been taken to the police station for *poochhtaach* (inquiry) and then unceremoniously locked up and later sent to Tihar on judicial remand, there were others who had been taken to the police station without assigning any reason whatsoever.

The reactions on being told of the proper procedure of arrest, their right to know of the offence for which they are being arrested and the illegality of police beating and illtreating arrested persons, ranged from cynical amusement to indignation. Some of them promised to educate others in this regard after getting out of jail. The common feeling was, 'If we had known all this before, we would not have allowed this to happen to us.'

While personal contact and other methods of communication are essential for recipients to internalise the concept of law, dissemination of written material is invaluable in achieving a trickle-down effect for legal awareness. People who could barely read have been known to use such books to good effect. One can quote authoritatively: 'This book says that such and such thing must be done.' Also, the maxim *Vox emissa volat* proves that the spoken word flies away, but the written word is surely a bird in hand!

Knowledge or awareness of law cannot be touted as a panacea for all our ills. It can and does, however, work as a homeopathic medicine which given in small doses over a period of time, can attack the disease at the root and make the system healthy.

Is there an Indian way of thinking?

A K RAMANUJAN

Walter Benjamin once 'dreamed of hiding behind a phalanx of quotations which, like highwaymen, would ambush the passing reader and rob him of his convictions.

I

Stanislavsky had an exercise for his actors. He would give them an everyday sentence like, 'Bring me a cup of tea', and ask them to say it forty different ways, using it to beg, question, mock, wheedle, be imperious, etc. My question, 'Is there an Indian way of thinking?', is a good one for such an exercise. Depending on where the stress is placed, it contains many questions – all of which are real questions – asked again and again when people talk about India. Here are a few possible versions:

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Is there an Indian way of thinking?
Is there *an* Indian way of thinking?
Is there an *Indian* way of thinking?
Is there an Indian way of *thinking*?

The answers are just as various. Here are a few: There *was* an Indian way of thinking; there isn't any more. If you want to learn about the Indian way of thinking, do not ask your modern-day citified Indians, go to the pundits, the *vaidyas*, the old texts. On the contrary: India never changes; under the veneer of the modern, Indians still think like the vedas.

The second question might elicit answers like these: There is no single Indian way of thinking; there are Great and Little Traditions, ancient and modern, rural and urban, classical and folk. Each language, caste and region has its special world view. So, under the apparent diversity there is really a unity of viewpoint, a single supersystem. Vedists see a vedic model in all Indian thought. Nehru made the phrase 'unity in diversity' an Indian slogan. The Sahitya Akademi's line has

been, 'Indian literature is One, though written in many languages.'

The third question might be answered: What we see in India is nothing special to India; it is nothing but pre-industrial, pre-printing press, face-to-face, agricultural, feudal. Marxists, Freudians, McLuhanites, all have their labels for the stage India is in, according to their scheme of social evolution; India is only an example. Others, of course, would argue the uniqueness of the Indian Way and how it turns all things, especially rivals and enemies, into itself; look at what has happened to Indo-Europeans in India, they would say: their language gets shot with retroflexes, their syntax with nominal compounds, they lose their nerve—the British are only the most recent example (according to Nirad Chaudhuri). Look what happens to Buddhism, Islam, the Parsis. There is an *Indian* way, and it imprints and patterns all things that enter the continent; it is inescapable, and it is Bigger Than All of Us.

The fourth question may question whether Indians think at all: It is the West that is materialistic, rational; Indians have no philosophy, only religion, no positive sciences, not even a psychology; in India, matter is subordinated to spirit, rational thought to feeling, intuition. And even when people agree that this is the case, we can have arguments for and against it. Some lament, others celebrate India's unthinking ways. One can go on forever.

We—I, certainly—have stood in one or another of these stances at different times. We have not heard the end of these questions or these answers.

II

The problem was posed for me personally at the age of 20 in the image of my father. I had never taken a good look at him till then. Didn't Mark Twain say, 'At 17, I thought my father was ignorant; at 20, I wondered how he learned so much in three years?' Indeed, this essay was inspired by contemplation of him over the years, and is dedicated to him

My father's clothes represented his inner life very well. He was a south Indian

Brahmin gentleman. He wore neat white turbans, a Sri Vaisnava caste mark (in his earlier pictures, a diamond earring), yet wore Tootal ties, Kromentz buttons and collar studs, and donned English serge jackets over his muslim *dhotis* which he wore draped in traditional Brahmin style. He often wore tartan-patterned socks and silent well-polished leather shoes when he went to the university, but he carefully took them off before he entered the inner quarters of the house.

He was a mathematician, an astronomer. But he was also a Sanskrit scholar, an expert astrologer. He had two kinds of exotic visitors: American and English mathematicians who called on him when they were on a visit to India, and local astrologers, orthodox pandits who wore splendid gold-embroidered shawls dowered by the Maharajah. I had just been converted by Russell to the 'scientific attitude'. I (and my generation) was troubled by his holding together in one brain both astronomy and astrology; I looked for consistency in him, a consistency he didn't seem to care about, or even think about. When I asked him what the discovery of Pluto and Neptune did to his archaic nine-planet astrology, he said, 'You make the necessary corrections, that's all.' Or, in answer to how he could read the Gita religiously, having bathed and painted on his forehead the red and white feet of Visnu, and later talk appreciatively about Bertrand Russell and even Ingersoll, he said, 'The Gita is part of one's hygiene. Besides, don't you know, the brain has two lobes?'

The following poem says something about the way he and his friends appeared to me:

Sky-man in a man-hole
with astronomy for dream,
astrology for nightmare;

fat man full of proverbs,
the language of lean years,
living in square after

almanac square
prefiguring the day

of windfall and landslide

through a calculus
of good hours,
clutching at the tear

in his birthday shirt
as at a hole
in his mildewed horoscope,

squinting at the parallax
of black planets,
his Tiger, his Hare

moving in Sanskrit zodiacs,
forever troubled
by the fractions, the kidneys

in his Tamil flesh,
his body the Great Bear
dipping for the honey,

the woman-smell
in the small curly hair
down there

(Ramanujan 1986: 24)

III

Both Englishmen and 'modern' Indians have been dismayed and angered by this kind of inconsistency. About twenty years ago, *The illustrated weekly of India* asked a number of modern Indian intellectuals to describe the Indian character—they did not seem to be daunted by the assignment and wrote terse, some quite sharp, columns. They all seemed to agree on one thing: the Indian trait of hypocrisy. Indians do not mean what they say, and say different things at different times. By 'Indians' they did not mean only servants. In Max Mueller's lectures (1883) on India, the second chapter was called 'Truthful character of the Hindus', in answer to many complaints

Recently I attended a conference on *karma*, a notion that is almost synonymous in some circles with whatever is Indian or Hindu. Brahminical texts had it, the Buddhists had it, the Jainas had it. But when I looked at hundreds of Kannada tales, I couldn't find a single tale that used *karma* as a motif or motive. Yet when their

children made a mess, their repertoire of abuse included, 'You are my *karma*!' When Harper (1959) and others after him reported that many Indian villagers didn't know much about reincarnation, such a discrepancy was attributed to caste, education, etc. But the 2,000 Kannada tales, collected by me and others over the past twenty years, were told by Brahmins, Jainas (both of whom use *karma* in their explanations elsewhere quite readily), and by other communities as well. What is worse, Sheryl Daniel (1983) independently found that her Tamil villagers alternately used *karma* and *talaividi* ('headwriting') as explanations for the events around them. The two notions are inconsistent with each other. *Karma* implies the self's past determining the present, an iron chain of cause and consequence, an ethic of responsibility. *Talaividi* is one's fate inscribed arbitrarily at one's birth on one's forehead; the inscription has no relation to one's prior actions; usually in such explanations (and folktales about them) past lives are not even part of the scheme (see also Wadley, in this volume).

Another related characteristic seems to preoccupy observers. We have already said that 'inconsistency' (like my father's, or the Brahmin/Jaina use of *karma*) is not a matter of inadequate education or lack of logical rigor. They may be using a different 'logic' altogether. Some thinkers believe that such logic is an earlier-stage of 'cultural evolution' and that Indians have not developed a notion of 'data', of 'objective facts'. Edward Said's *Orientalism* cites many such European stereotypes about the 'Third World'. Here is Henry Kissinger's explanation:

Cultures which escaped the early impact of Newtonian thinking have retained the essentially pre-Newtonian view that the world is almost completely internal to the observer... (Consequently) empirical reality has a much different significance for many of the new (old?) countries than for the West because in a certain sense they never

went through the process of discovering it (Said 1978: 47).

Such a view cannot be dismissed as peculiar to Kissinger's version of Newtonian optics. One meets with it again and again in travelogues, psychological writings, novels. Naipaul quotes Sudhir Kakar, a sophisticated psychoanalyst, deeply knowledgeable in matters Indian as well as Western, an insider/outsider:

Generally among Indians there seems to be a different relationship to outside reality, compared to the one met with in the West. In India it is closer to a certain stage in childhood when outer objects did not have a separate, independent existence but were intimately related to the self and its affective states.... The Indian 'ego' is underdeveloped; the world of magic and animistic thinking lie close to the surface; so the grasp of reality is 'relatively tenuous' (1977: 107).

In a memorable and oft-quoted section of Forster's *A passage to India*, Mrs. Moore muses vividly on the relations between inside and outside in India; the confounding of the two is not special to humans in India:

Going to hang up her cloak, she found the tip of the peg was occupied by a small wasp. She had known this wasp or his relatives by song; they were not as English wasps, but had long yellow legs which hung down behind when they flew. Perhaps he mistook the peg for a branch—no Indian animal has any sense of an interior. Bats, rats, birds, insects will as soon nest inside the house as out, it is to them a normal growth of the eternal jungle, which alternately produces houses, trees, houses, trees. There he clung, asleep, while jackals bayed their desires and mingled with the percussion of drums (1952: 35).

And sympaticos, like Zimmer, praise the Indians for not being hung up on an objectivity that distinguishes self

from non-self, interior from exterior; what for Naipaul is a 'defect of vision', is for Zimmer vision itself.

India thinks of time and herself .. in biological terms, term of the species, not of the ephemeral ego... We of the west regard world history as a biography of mankind, and in particular of Occidentalism... Our will is not to culminate in our human institutions the universal play of nature, but to evaluate, to set ourselves against the play, with an ego-centric tenacity (1946: 21)

A third trait should be added to 'inconsistency', and to the apparent inability to distinguish self and non-self. One has only to read *Manu* after a bit of Kant to be struck by the former's extraordinary lack of universality. He seems to have no clear notion of a universal *human* nature from which one can deduce ethical decrees like 'Man shall not kill', or 'Man shall not tell an untruth'. One is aware of no notion of a 'state', no unitary law of all men.

Manu VIII 267 (quoted by Mueller 1883) has the following: A Kshatriya, having defamed a Brahmana, shall be fined one hundred (*panas*), a Vaisya one hundred and fifty or two hundred, a Sudra shall suffer corporal punishment.

Even truth-telling is not an unconditional imperative, as Mueller's correspondents discovered.

An untruth spoken by people under the influence of anger, excessive joy, fear, pain, or grief, by infants, by very old men, by persons labouring under a delusion, being under the influence of drink, or by mad men, does not cause the speaker to fall, or as we should say, is a venial not a mortal sin (Gautama, paraphrased by Mueller [1883: 70]).

Alexander Wilder adds, in a footnote, further extensions:

At the time of marriage, during dalliance, when life is in danger, when the

loss of property is threatened, and for the sake of a Brahmana... Manu declared... whenever the death of a man of any of the four castes would be occasioned by true evidence, falsehood was even better than truth (Mueller 1883: 89).

Contrast this with Kant's well-known formulation of his imperative: 'Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a Universal Law of Nature' (Copleston 1946: 116).

'Moral judgements are universalisable,' says Mackie (1977: 83). Universalisation means putting oneself in another's place – it is the golden rule of the New Testament, Hobbes' 'law of all men': do not do unto others what you do not want done unto you. The main tradition of Judeo/Christian ethics is based on such a premise of universalisation – Manu will not understand such a premise. To be moral, for Manu, is to particularise – to ask who did what, to whom and when. Shaw's comment, 'Do not do unto others as you would have they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same' (Mackie 1977: 89) will be closer to Manu's view, except he would substitute 'natures or classes' for 'tastes'. Each class (*jati*) of man has his own laws, his own proper ethic, not to be universalised. Hegel shrewdly noted this Indian slant: 'While we say, "Bravery is a virtue," the Hindoos say, on the contrary, "Bravery is a virtue of the Cshatriyas"' (Hegel ca. 1827: First part, Sect. 2, 'India').

Is there any system to this particularism? Indian philosophers do not seem to make synoptic 'systems' like Hegel's or Kant's. Sheryl Daniel (1983) speaks of a 'tool-box' of ideas that Indians carry about, and from which they use one or another without much show of logic; anything goes into their 'bricolage' (Levi-Strauss 1962: 16–36). Max Weber, in various writings, distinguished 'traditional' and 'rational' religions. Geertz summarises the distinction better than other writers:

Traditional religions attack problems

opportunistically as they arise in each particular instance... employing one or another weapon chosen, on grounds of symbolic appropriateness, from their cluttered arsenal of myth and magic... the approach... is discrete and irregular... Rationalized religions... are more abstract, more logically coherent, and more generally phrased.... The question is no longer... to use a classical example from Evans-Pritchard, 'Why has the granary fallen on my brother...?' but rather, 'Why do the good die young and the evil flourish as the green bay tree?' (Geertz 1973: 172).

IV

It is time to step back and try a formulation. The grammarian sees grammar in all things; I shall be true to my bias and borrow a notion from linguistics and try it for size.

There are (or used to be) two kinds of grammatical rules; the context-free and the context-sensitive (Lyons 1971: 235–41). 'Sentences must have subjects and predicates in a certain relation' would be an example of the first kind of rule. 'Plurals in English are realised as -s after stops (e.g. dog-s, cat-s), -es before fricatives (e.g. latch-es), -ren after the word *child*, etc.' – would be a context-sensitive rule. Almost all language rules are of the latter kind.

I think cultures (may be said to) have overall tendencies (for whatever complex reasons) – tendencies to *idealise*, and think in terms of either the context-free or the context-sensitive kind of rules. Actual behaviour may be more complex, though the rules they think with are a crucial factor in guiding the behaviour. In cultures like India's, the context-sensitive kind of rule is the preferred formulation. Manu (I have already quoted a law of his) explicitly says: '[A king] who knows the sacred law, must imagine into the laws of caste (*jati*), of districts, of guilds, and of families, and [thus] settle the peculiar law of each' (Manu 7.41).

In an illuminating discussion of the context-sensitive nature of *dharma* in its

detail, Baudhayana enumerates aberrant practices peculiar to the Brahmins of the north and those of the south.

There is a difference between the South and the North on five points. We shall describe the practices of the South: to eat with a person not having received Brahmanical initiation; to eat with one's wife; to eat food prepared the previous day; to marry the daughter of the maternal uncle or paternal aunt. And for the North: to sell wool; to drink spirits, to traffic in animals with two rows of teeth; to take up the profession of arms; to make sea voyages.

After this admirable ethnographic description, he notes that all these practices are contrary to the precepts of *sruti* or *smṛti*, but these *sistas* (learned men) know the traditions and cannot be blamed for following the customs of their district. In the north, the southern ways would be wrong and vice versa (Lingat 1973: 196).

Add to this view of right and wrong behaviour, the ethical views of the *asramadharma* (the conduct that is right for one's stage of life), *svadharma* (the conduct that is right for one's station, *jati* or class, or *svabhava* or given nature), and *apaddharma* (conduct that is necessary in times of distress or emergency, e.g., one may even eat the flesh of dogs to save oneself from death by starvation, as sage Visvamitra did). Each addition is really a subtraction from any universal law. There is not much left of an absolute or common (*sadharana*) *dharma* which the texts speak of, if at all, as a last and not as a first resort. They seem to say, if you fit no contexts or conditions, which is unlikely, fall back on the universal.

I know of no Hindu discussion of values which reads like Plato on Beauty in his *Symposium* – which asks the initiate not to rest content with beauty in one embodiment but to be drawn onward from physical to moral beauty, to the beauty of laws and mores, and to all science and learning, and thus to escape 'the mean slavery of the particular case'. (I am reserving counter-instances for later.)

Or take Indian literary texts. No Indian text comes without a context, a frame, till the 19th century. Works are framed by *phalasaruti* verses—these verses tell the reader, reciter or listener all the good that will result from his act of reading, reciting or listening. They relate the text, of whatever antiquity, to the present reader—that is, they contextualise it. An extreme case is that of the Nadisastra, which offers you your personal history. A friend of mine consulted the Experts about himself and his past and future. After enough rupees had been exchanged, the Experts brought out an old palm-leaf manuscript which, in archaic verses, mentioned his full name, age, birthplace, etc., and said suddenly, ‘At this point, the listener is crossing his legs—he should uncross them.’

Texts may be historically dateless, anonymous; but their contexts, uses, efficacies, are explicit. The Ramayana and Mahabharata open with episodes that tell you why and under what circumstances they were composed. Every such story is encased in a metastory. And within the text, one tale is the context for another within it; not only does the outer frame-story motivate the inner sub-story; the inner story illuminates the outer as well. It often acts as a microcosmic replica for the whole text. In the forest when the Pandava brothers are in exile, the eldest, Yudhisthira, is in the very slough of despondency: he has gambled away a kingdom, and is in exile. In the depth of his despair, a sage visits him and tells him the story of Nala. As the story unfolds, we see Nala too gamble away a kingdom, lose his wife, wander in the forest, and finally, win his wager, defeat his brother, reunite with his wife and return to his kingdom. Yudhisthira, following the full curve of Nala’s adventures, sees that he is only halfway through his own, and sees his present in perspective, himself as a story yet to be finished. Very often the Nala story is excerpted and read by itself, but its poignancy is partly in its frame, its meaning for the hearer within the fiction and for the listener of the whole epic. The tale within

is context-sensitive—getting its meaning from the tale without, and giving it further meanings.

Scholars have often discussed Indian texts (like the Mahabharata) as if they were loose-leaf files, rag-bag encyclopaedias. Taking the Indian word for text, *grantha* (derived from the knot that holds the palm leaves together), literally, scholars often posit only an accidental and physical unity. We need to attend to the context-sensitive designs that embed a seeming variety of modes (tale, discourse, poem, etc.) and materials. This manner of constructing the text is in consonance with other designs in the culture. Not unity (in the Aristotelian sense) but coherence, seems to be the end.

Tamil (and Sanskrit) lyrics are all dramatic monologues; they imply the whole ‘communication diagram’: who said what to whom, when, why, and often with who else overhearing it. Here is an example:

What his concubine said about him
(within earshot of the wife’s friends, when she heard that the wife had said disparaging things about her):

You know he comes from
where the fresh-water shark in the
pools
catch with their mouths
the mangoes as they fall, ripe
from the trees on the edge of the field.

At our place
he talked big.

Now back in his own
when others raise their hands
and feet,
he will raise his too.

like a doll
in a mirror

he will shadow
every last wish
of his son’s dear mother

Kuruntokai 8
(Ramanujan 1967: 22)

The colophons give us the following frames for this poem:

Genre: *Akam*, love poetry, the ‘interior’.

Landscape: agricultural, with pool, fresh-water fish, mango trees.

Mood: infidelity, sullenness, lover’s quarrels.

The poetry of such a poem (see Ramanujan 1967 for details) depends on a taxonomy of landscapes, flora and fauna, and of emotions—an ecosystem of which a man’s activities and feelings are a part. To describe the exterior landscape is also to inscribe the interior landscape. What the man has, he is: the landscape which he owns, in which he lives (where sharks do not have to work for the mango, if falls into its open mouth) re-presents him: it is his *property*, in more senses than one. In Burke’s (1946) terms, *Scene and Agent* are one; they are metonyms for one another.

The poem does not use a metaphor. The human agents are simply *placed* in the scene. Both parts of the comparison (the man and shark) are part of one scene, one syntagm; they exist separately, yet simulate each other. The Tamils call such a figure *ullurai* ‘inward speaking’; it is an ‘inset’, an ‘inscape’. In such a metonymic view of man in nature—man in context—he is continuous with the context he is in. In Peircean semiotic terms, these are not symbolic devices, but indexical signs—the signifier and the signified belong in the same context (Peirce 1931-58).

One might say, from this point of view, that Hindu ritual (e.g. vedic sacrifice, or a coronation; see Inden [1978]) converts *symbols*, arbitrary signs (e.g. sacrificial horse), into *icons* where the signifier (the horse) is *like* what it signifies (the universe) and finally into *indexes*, where the signifier is *part* of what it signifies: the horse is the Universe is Prajapati, so that in sacrificing and partaking of it one is sacrificing and partaking of the Universe itself (see the passage on the Horse in *Brhadaranyaka*, First Adhyaya, First Brahmana)

Neither in the Tamil poem nor in the upanisadic passages (e.g. the Horse), does

the Levi-Straussian opposition of nature-culture make sense; we see that the opposition itself is culture-bound. There is another alternative to a culture vs. nature view: in the Tamil poems, culture is enclosed in nature, nature is reworked in culture, so that we cannot tell the difference. We have a nature-culture continuum that cancels the terms, confuses them even if we begin with them.

Such container-contained relations are seen in many kinds of concepts and images: not only in culture-nature, but god-world, king-kingdom, devotee-god, mother-child. Here is a *bhakti* poem which plays with many such concentric containments:

My dark one
Stands there as if nothing's changed,

after taking entire
into his maw
all three worlds
the gods
and the good kings
who hold their lands
as a mother would
a child in her womb –

and I, by his leave,
have taken him entirely

and I have him in my belly
for keeps.

Nammalvar 8.7.1
(Ramanujan 1980)

Like the Nala story in the Mahabharata, what is contained mirrors the container; the microcosm is both *within* and like the macrocosm, and paradoxically also contains it. Indian conceptions tend to be such concentric nests: the view of the 'sheaths' or *kosas*, the different 'bodies' of *kayas* (Egnor 1975) are examples. Such impressions are so strong and even kinesthetic that analysts tend to think in similar terms: one example is Dumont's (1970; Sects 31, 34, 106, 118, App. E, F) notions of hierarchic encompassment, where each higher category or *jati* encompasses all the earlier ones. the Ksatriya is distinct from

but includes the Vaisya, as the Brahmin encompasses the Ksatriya. Many Indian lists, like *dharma-artha-kama* tend to be successive encompassments. (For the separation of *moksa*, see below)

Even space and time, the universal contexts, the Kantian imperatives, are in India not uniform and neutral, but have properties, varying specific densities, that affect those who dwell in them. The soil in a village, which produces crops for the people, affects their character (as liars, for instance, in E.V. Daniel's village (1984); houses (containers par excellence) have mood and character, change the fortune and moods of the dwellers. Time too does not come in uniform units: certain hours of the day, certain days of the week, etc., are auspicious or inauspicious (*rahukala*); certain units of time (*yugas*) breed certain kinds of maladies, politics, religions, e.g., *kaliyuga*. A story is told about two men coming to Yudhisthira with a case. One had bought the other's land, and soon after found a crock of gold in it. He wanted to return it to the original owner of the land, who was arguing that it really belonged to the man who had now bought it. They had come to Yudhisthira to settle their virtuous dispute. Just then Yudhisthira was called away (to put it politely) for a while. When he came back the two gentlemen were quarrelling furiously, but each was claiming the treasure for himself. This time! Yudhisthira realised at once that the age had changed, and *kaliyuga* had begun.

As hour, month, season, year, and aeon have their own properties as contexts, the arts that depend on time have to obey time's changing moods and properties. For instance, the *ragas* of both north and south Indian classical music have their prescribed appropriate times. Like the Tamil poems, the genres and moods are associated with, placed in, hours of the day and times of the season. Even musical instruments have their caste properties; a *vina*, no less than the icon of a god, has to be made by a particular caste, or family, after observing certain austerities (*vrata*), made on an auspicious day; the gourd from which it is made has to be taken from certain kinds of places. Their

gunas (qualities of substance) affect the quality of the instrument, the music.

The same kind of contextual sensitivity is shown in medical matters: in preparing a herbal medicine, in diagnosis and in prescription. As Zimmermann's work (1980) is eloquent on the subject, I shall say little. The notion of *rtusatmya* or appropriateness applies to poetry, music, sacrificial ritual, as well as medicine. As Renou (1950a, 1950b) points out, *rtu*, usually translated as 'season', means articulation of time, it is also the crucial moment in vedic sacrifice. *Rta* ('order', the original notion behind *dharma*) is that which is articulated. *Kratu*, sacrifice, is a convergence of events, acts, times and spaces. The vocabulary of *rtusatmya* 'appropriateness', *rasa* 'essences, flavours, tastes', *dosa* 'defects, deficiency', and of landscapes is common to both medicine and poetry: the arts of man reading and re-forming himself in his contexts.

Thus, all things, even so-called non-material ones like space and time or caste, affect other things because all things are 'substantial' (*dhatu*). The only difference is that some are subtle (*sukhma*), some gross (*sthula*). Contrary to the notion that Indians are 'spiritual', they are really 'material minded'. They are materialists, believers in substance (Marriott 1976, 1980): there is a continuity, a constant flow (the etymology of *samsara*!) of substance from context to object, from non-self to self (if you prefer) – in eating, breathing, sex, sensation, perception, thought, art, or religious experience. This is the grain of truth glimpsed by many of the stereotypes cited in the earlier parts of this essay. Zimmermann (1979) points out that in Indian medical texts, the body is a meeting-place, a conjunction of elements, they have a physiology, but no anatomy.

Where Kissinger and others are wrong is in not seeing that this view has nothing to do with Newtonian revolution, education, or (in)capacity for abstract thought. Cognitive anthropologists like Richard Shweder (1972) have studied descriptive phrases used by highly intelligent Oriya and American adults and

shown that they describe persons very differently: Americans characterised them with generic words like 'good', 'nice', Oriyas with concrete contextual descriptions like 'he brings sweets'. The psychoanalyst Alan Roland (1979) suggests that Indians carry their family-context wherever they go, feel continuous with their family. He posits a familial self, a 'self-we regard', sees no phase of separation/individuation from the parental family as in modern America; hence there seems to be no clear-cut adolescent phase through which one rebels, and thereby separates and individuates oneself in opposition to one's family (the exceptions are in 'modern' urban-centred families). Roland remarks that Indians develop a 'radar' *conscience* that orients them to others, makes them say things that are appropriate to person and context. (No wonder Max Mueller had to insist that Indians were truthful!) Roland also found that when directions to places are given, Indians always make reference to other places, landmarks.

Such a pervasive emphasis on context is, I think, related to the Hindu concern with *jati* – the logic of classes, of genera and species, of which human *jatis* are only an instance. Various taxonomies of season, landscape, times, *gunas* or qualities (and their material bases), tastes, characters, emotions, essences (*rasa*), etc., are basic to the thought-work of Hindu medicine and poetry, cooking and religion, erotics and magic. Each *jati* or class defines a context, a structure of relevance, a rule of permissible combinations, a frame of reference, a meta-communication of what is and can be done.

It is not surprising that systems of Indian philosophy, Hindu, Buddhist, or Jaina,

confine themselves to the consideration of class-essences (*jati*) called genera and species in Western philosophy. They never raise the question of whether there are universals of other types, namely identical qualities and relations. The assumption seems to be that qualities and relations are particu-

lars, though they may be instances of universals (Dravid 1972: 347)

The most important and accessible model of a context-sensitive system with intersecting taxonomies is, of course, the grammar of a language. And grammar is the central model for thinking in many Hindu texts. As Frits Staal has said, what Euclid is to European thought, the grammarian Panini is to the Indian. Even the Kamasutra is literally a grammar of love – which declines and conjugates men and women as one would nouns and verbs in different genders, voices, moods and aspects. Genders are genres. Different body-types and character-types obey different rules, respond to different scents and beckonings.

In such a world, systems of meanings are elicited by contexts, by the nature (and substance) of the listener. In *Brhadaranyaka* 5.1, Lord Prajapati speaks in thunder three times: 'DA DA DA'. When the gods, given to pleasure hear it, they hear it as the first syllable of *danyata*, control. The antigods, given as they are to cruelty, hear it as *dayadhvam*, 'be compassionate'. When the humans, given to greed, hear it, they hear it as *datta*, 'give to others'

V

All societies have context-sensitive behaviour and rules – but the dominant ideal may not be the 'context-sensitive' but the 'context-free'. Egalitarian democratic ideals, Protestant Christianity, espouse both the universal and the unique, insist that any member is *equal* to and *like* any other in the group. Whatever his context – birth, class, gender, age, place, rank, etc. – a man is a man for all that. Technology with all its modules and interchangeable parts, and the post-Renaissance sciences with their quest for universal laws (and 'facts') across contexts intensify the bias towards the context-free. Yet societies have underbellies. In predominantly 'context-free' societies, the counter-movements tend to be towards the 'context-sensitive' situation ethics, Wittgensteinian notions of meaning and colour (against class-logic),

the various relativisms including our own search for 'native categories' in anthropology, holistic movements in medicine (naturopaths who prescribe individually tailored regimens) are good examples. In 'traditional' cultures like India, where context-sensitivity rules and binds, the dream is to be free of context. So *rasa* in aesthetics, *moksa* in the 'aims of life', *sannyasa* in the life-stages, *sphota* in semantics, and *bhakti* in religion define themselves against a background of inexorable contextuality.

Where *kama*, *artha* and *dharma* are all relational in their values, tied to place, time, personal character and social role, *moksa* is the release from all relations. If *brahmacharya* (celibate studentship) is preparation for a fully relational life, *grhasthasrama* (householder stage) is a full realisation of it. Manu prefers the latter over all other states. *Vanaprastha* (the retiring forest-dweller stage) loosens the bonds, and *sannyasa* (renunciation) cremates all one's past and present relations. In the realm of feeling, *bhavas* are private, contingent, context-roused sentiments, *vibhavas* are determinant causes, *anubhavas* the consequent expressions. But 'rasa' is generalised, it is an essence. In the field of meaning, the temporal sequence of letters and phonemes, the syntactic chain of words, yields finally a *sphota*, an explosion, a meaning which is beyond sequence and time.

In each of these, the pattern is the same, a necessary sequence in time with strict rules of phase and context ending in a free state.

The last of the great Hindu anti-contextual notions, *bhakti*, is different from the above; it denies the very need for context. *Bhakti* defies all contextual structures: every pigeonhole of caste, ritual, gender, appropriate clothing and custom, stage of life, the whole system of homo hierarchicus ('everything in its place') is the target of its irony.

Did the breath of the mistress
have breasts and long hair?
Or did the master's breath
wear a sacred thread?

Did the outcaste, last in line,
hold with his outgoing breath
the stick of his tribe?

What do the fools of this world know
of the snares you set,
O Ramanatha?

Dasimayya, 10th century
(Ramanujan 1973)

In European culture, one might mention Plato's rebellion against (even the limited) Athenian democracy. Or Blake in the technocratic democracy of the 19th century railing against egalitarianism, abstraction, and the dark Satanic mills, calling for 'minute particulars', declaring 'To generalize is to be an idiot' (generalising thereby), and framing the slogan of all context-sensitive systems: 'one law for the lion and the ox is oppression'. I would include the rise of minute realism in the 19th century novel, various 'indexical' movements of modern art in this counter-thrust towards particularism in the West.

Neither the unique, nor the universal, the two, often contradictory, concerns of western philosophy, art and polity, are the central concern of the Indian arts and sciences – except in the counter-cultures and modern attempts, which quickly get enlisted and remolded (witness the fate of *bhakti* movements) by the prevailing context-sensitive patterns.

VI

In conclusion, I would like to make a couple of observations about 'modernisation'. One might see 'modernisation' in India as a movement from the context-sensitive to the context-free in all realms. an erosion of contexts, at least in principle. Gandhi's watch (with its uniform autonomous time, governing his punctuality) replaced the almanac. Yet Gandhi quoted Emerson, that consistency was the hobgoblin of foolish minds. Print replaced palm-leaf manuscripts, making possible an open and egalitarian access to knowledge irrespective of caste. The Indian Constitution made the contexts of birth,

region, sex and creed irrelevant, overthrowing Manu, though the battle is joined again and again. The new preferred names give no clue to birth-place, father's name, caste, sub-caste and sect, as all the traditional names did. I once found in a Kerala college roster, three 'Joseph Stalins' and one 'Karl Marx'. I have also heard of an Andhra named 'Bobbili Winston Churchill'.

In music, the *ragas* can now be heard at all hours and seasons. Once the Venkatesasuprabhatam, the wake-up chant for the Lord of Tirupati, could be heard only in Tirupati at a certain hour in the morning. Since M. S. Subbulakshmi in her devotion cut a record of the chants, it wakes up not only the Lord, but anyone who tunes in to All India Radio in far-away places.

Cultural borrowings from India to the West, or vice versa, also show interesting accommodations to the prevailing system. The highly contextualised Hindu systems are generalised into 'a Hindu view of life' by apologues like Radhakrishnan for the benefit of both the Western and modern Indian readers. The individual esoteric skills of meditation are freed from their contexts into a streamlined widely accessible technique. And when T.S. Eliot borrows the DA DA DA passage (quoted earlier) to end 'The Wasteland' (1930), it becomes highly individual, introspective, as well as universal:

Then spoke the thunder

DA

datta: what have we given?

My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's
surrender

Which an age of prudence can never
retract

By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our
obituaries

Or in memories draped by the benefi-
cent spider

Or under the seals broken by the lean
solicitor

In our empty rooms

DA

dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once
only

We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a
prison

Only at nightfall, aetheral rumours
Revive for a moment a broken
Coriolanus

DA

damyata: The boat responded

Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and
oar

The sea was calm, your heart would
have responded

Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands

In reverse, Indian borrowings of Western cultural items have been converted and realigned to fit pre-existing context-sensitive needs. When English is borrowed into (or imposed on) Indian contexts, it fits into the Sanskrit slot: it acquires many of the characteristics of Sanskrit, the older native Father-tongue, its pan-Indian elite character – as a medium of laws, science and administration, and its formulaic patterns, it becomes part of Indian multiple diglossia (a characteristic of context-sensitive societies). When Indians learn, quite expertly, modern science, business, or technology, they 'compartmentalize' these interests (Singer 1972: 320ff); the new ways of thought and behaviour do not replace, but live along with older 'religious' ways. Computers and typewriters receive *ayudhapuja* ('worship of weapons') as weapons of war did once. The 'modern', the context-free, becomes one more context, though it is not easy to contain.

In modern thought, William James with his 'sub-universes', or Alfred Schutz with his 'finite provinces of reality' and 'relevance' as central concepts in any understanding, should be re-read in the light of what I have said about context-sensitive and context-free modes. The most recent kinds of science can hold together inconsistent systems of explanation – like wave and particle theories of light. The counter-movements in the West

toward Schumacher's 'small is beautiful', appropriate technologies, and the attention paid to ethnicity rather than to a melting pot, though not yet successful, are straws in the wind like the ethnography of communication in linguistics.

My purpose here is not to evaluate but to grope toward a description of the two kinds of emphases. Yet in each of these kinds of cultures, despite all the complexity and oscillation, there is a definite bias. The Buddha (who said 'When we see a man shot with a poisoned arrow, we cannot afford to ask what caste he or his enemy is') also told the following parable of the Raft: Once a man was drowning in a sudden flood. Just as he was about to drown, he found a raft. He clung to it, and it carried him safely to dry land. And he was so grateful to the raft that he carried it on his back for the rest of his life. Such was the Buddha's ironic comment on context-free systems.

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Books

SAINTS, GODDESSES AND KINGS – Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900 by Susan Bayly. Cambridge South Asian Studies Foundation Books, Delhi, 1992 (reprint).

SUSAN BAYLY'S book is oddly inaccessible. When it was first published in 1989 by Cambridge University Press, people spoke in hushed whispers about how expensive it was. Most of us couldn't even imagine having access to it. But even though it has now been reprinted in India, it still remains elusive to locate. The importance of Susan Bayly's work merits some attention to the distribution of her work in a more systematic way.

Bayly's work is also somewhat inaccessible in a different sense, for her brilliantly erudite text is not easily comprehensible unless one is a specialist. The work is very dense, very large, very broad in scope and superlative in the variety of materials it handles. Yet, in some odd way, the author never imagines a reader. She writes for the joy of reading and writing, a privilege she understands the value of; thus there is an aura of the 'armchair anthropologist' about it. The sources are varied, their biases are not really discussed so that the time spans become conflated. But to be fair to Bayly one must admit that it is not strictly a chronology she traces: she aims at paradigmatic analyses.

There is something vaguely reminiscent of an Umberto Eco novel about Bayly's work, where the indecipherable codes of specialist scholarship available only if one has the key to the library for oneself. Here is a crafts-person working on a text, believing that the hundreds of layers that she builds her work upon will immediately be discernible to a fellow specialist. Sometimes, it begins to read like 'The Golden Bough'. In that sense, Saints, Goddesses and Kings will remain a classic – I think there is no doubt about that – but there are possibilities of it also remaining unread by a large section of readers interested in the subject because of the unnegotiable intellectual paraphernalia.

For purposes of this review I will deal only with Susan Bayly's analyses of the Christians of St. Thomas in Kerala.

It is simpler to concede that there are three or four books compacted in this one dense volume, and each section would require special attention. Bayly's ability to handle the fluid boundaries between Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the 18th century is commendable. She focuses her analyses on various sorts of boundaries: between Hindu/Christian, Hindu/Muslim, upper caste/lower caste, each of these being considered in relation to kingship and power, mediated further by local cults. Conversion history is an important part of her narrative.

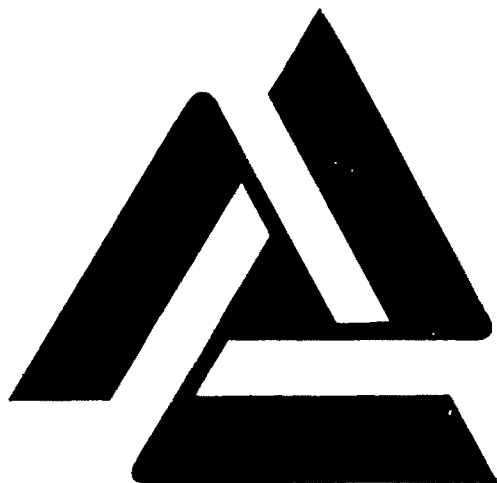
Bayly's intellectual obsession is with the analyses of power and how to understand that conceptual maps like varna cannot provide us the actual picture of the vitality of interaction. In the case of Kerala, where the caste system exists in an unusual way, occupation becomes the axis for understanding hierarchy but not, as we shall see, for understanding power. Bayly shows with deep insight the subtle tension that exists between 'warriors' and 'merchants'.

In a very single faceted way, one could say that in the traditional caste system in Kerala, the Syrian Christians held a place as an agricultural and merchant elite, believed to have descended from the Brahmin converts of St. Thomas, the Apostle of Christ. These descendants of the legendary apostasied Brahmin converts functioned as a Vaishya caste and were patronised by kings; they were given land and high caste privileges.

Susan Bayly emphasises that they were a *warrior* elite as well, her period of analyses being the 18th century. She argues that the Rajas of Travancore and Cochin depended upon Christian warriors who were high ranking, had stock piles of weapons and were tied to the networks of traditional martial training. In an earlier time, when Vasco da Gama had come in search of pepper and ancient Christians, it is said that he was met by a huge army of St. Thomas Christians, who wished to show him how powerful they were.

According to Susan Bayly, Raja Martanda Varma of Travancore recruited several thousand Syrian Christians during his conquests in north Travancore. They were also

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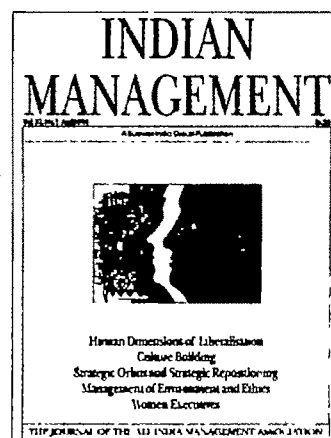
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part of a major network of the trade around pepper. Since they were not seen to be polluting, they participated in the ceremonies and regalia of kingship – the rituals and festivals of the court. She writes too that the Nairs were not averse to attending the festivals of the Christians in their churches.

During the 19th century, however, the St. Thomas Christians lost their power in the Hindu system of statecraft and ritual; when the kings entered into tributary alliances with the English, the traditional structures of power and status collapsed. Bayly argues that the British projected the Syrians as being in a state of poverty and spiritual repression in order to be the ones who would uplift these down-trodden ancient Christians of St. Thomas and logically perhaps convert them to their own interpretation of Christianity. She asserts here the loss of Christian warriorhood since they were no longer called upon to support the local kings and 'they were surprisingly quick to abandon the displays of martial skill and elan, which had been noticed by so many foreign travellers.'

Bayly handles the important relationship between Nair and Brahmin mediated by the Christians very subtly. She suggests that the Christians had occupational and ritual rank with the upper Nair caste groups, and a cultural memory of Brahmin descent. This corresponds with my own field-work analyses of the Christians of St. Thomas conducted in 1981-82. However, for some reason, she suggests that the 'Brahminisation' occurs in the 19th century in order to cope with the tensions of being associated with the missionary Christianity of the colonials. But to me it seems that the legends of priestly lineage, and the patriarchal biases of their life cycle rituals suggest a much longer association with Brahminical Hinduism.

Further, I found it paradoxical that in keeping with the conventional contemporary discourse where 'Bash the British' is a popular intellectual pastime, she finds it necessary to castigate the missionaries for recording that the Christians of St. Thomas were in a poor state, but then goes on herself in a meticulous fashion to record the reasons for their loss of power. Also there is a small misunderstanding: Cheryapalli in Kottayam is the 'Little' church. It lies very close to Valiyapalli the 'Big' church.

However, there is no minimising Bayly's contribution to the debates on caste in traditional society. The historical reconstruction of the warrior function of the Syrians (which has been suggested in many ecclesiastical histories, although there has been no focus upon it) puts a very different and important emphasis on the reading of Nair-Christian relationships. It explains much of the tensions implicit in this encounter, because if the Christians shared occupational functions then the immediacy of their relationship with the Nair is much more potent. The exclusion-inclusion model provided by caste analyses in terms of economic functions or symbolic status, where the Christians are seen merely as an agricultural or merchant elite, would no longer be sufficient for the reading of traditional caste society in Kerala.

The question then remains: how do we understand caste and power in secular India? I think it is important to reiterate that there can be no 'secular' caste system. If we reinvigorate the caste system we must live with the memories of pain that is part of karmic theory. While a theory of the circulation of elites is perfectly valid from every perspective, caste-memories are much more problematic. They create segregation of a different order, topsy-turvy in terms of tradition, nevertheless imbued with the same volatile emotions. I have second generation 'reservation' students in the classroom (whose local guardians live in South Avenue) who suffer deeply when I teach caste from the consensus perspectives of purity-pollution, karma/dharma/moksha and the jajmani system. They look as if they will never be free of generations of pain and bondage. They recall that by their name and 'reservation' status they are imbued by the hierarchy of the pure and impure, though their class positions may have changed. Hierarchy is hierarchy, whether the incumbents of that position enter a mirror opposite position or not.

The correspondence between caste and race, and caste and class is the bread and butter of much Sociology syllabi. However, the work of Dilip Menon which shows how a lower caste community in Kerala rise to political and economic privilege because of the liquor trade (1994); Susan Bayly's work on caste equivalencies between Nair and Christian (1989); and my work (1993) which argues that the Christians of Kerala maintained cultural and theological coherence in the face of repeated colonial onslaughts by virtue of their elite caste status, contests the one-to-one correspondence between class, honour and power.

This fluidity of boundary between class, honour and power have been the potential sources of freedom, of checks and balances on rigid or reifying structures. Where the three categories coalesce one moves away from the probabilities of freedom and runs into the liabilities of 'closed' structures of stratification.

The language of disprivilage, and the recognition of the necessity to understand it remains our primary motive. Caste politics can never be secular or equal because by its logic it must always be based on the legitimacy of exclusion. This is obviously not the place where one wants to intellectualise or discuss the 'ubiquity' of hierarchy as the bases for legitimising it.

Sucheta Mahajan once told me that when she travelled through the villages and towns of U.P. as part of an oral history research project, there never seemed to be any problems, in conversations, on the part of the Muslims over understanding Ramrajya, as Gandhiji used it. Today many of us understand the return to Ramrajya as a return to hierarchy. Perhaps we now need an exegesis of the term dharma.

For me, it is interesting to note that the Syrian Christians of Kerala had traditionally always been guided by the *Sabha* or Church which functioned very much like a caste

organisation. In all questions of strife it was the *pallikar* or parishioners who decided the fate of those who broke the law. This is particularly clear when one looks at litigational records in Christian disputes in the 19th century, and the oral memories inscribed therein on behalf of the witnesses. Excommunication or expulsion had obvious penal qualities. Silence, like laughter, can be the most potent weapon. For the excluded the social body becomes larger and larger, magnified by exclusion.

It is interesting too that in the latter part of the 19th century with the impact of British colonialism – which resulted of course in the translation and printing of the Bible, and the emergence of forms of Protestantism – one denomination of the Christians of St. Thomas actually appealed to the Royal Courts to resolve the feud between two of its segments. This shift from traditional law to Restitutive Law is significant, because once having accepted the state as mediator, the decision becomes binding upon the incumbents. Yet, what the Christians have discovered is the circularity of the legal case; they have been in the courts for more than a hundred years, and they can keep going back with 'a fresh case'.

Durkheim spoke of penal and repressive law. He also spoke of the opposition between the sacred and the profane. The profane is that which lies outside the sacred, that is antagonistic to the sacred. The 'profane' in Durkheim's terms is in many ways also the mundane, the routine, the every-day, the secular aspect of life.

So long as religion is kept apart from the secular realm it remains sacred. If it enters the domains of the secular it must be guided by the resolutions of the secular – in our case, the Constitution.

If socialism, secularism, freedom and equality hang together as a set we must accept the logic of that. If we choose totalitarianism, theocracy, hierarchy and inequality then we must live with the consequences of our choice. If we are free, our God(s) will be free – or else they will mirror our violence, our fear, our pain, our preoccupied watchfulness over one another.

Susan Bayly's very careful and detailed work highlights how closely interwoven our different cultural narratives are, so that authorship is somewhat difficult to negotiate; the tensions of our present, she seems to argue, is located in the problematic interstices of our past. In her hedonistic intellectual way, Bayly allows us to peep over her shoulder into a rich and varied world where everything is a construction upon the archival wonder of obscure footnotes, and strange and paradoxical revelations, collages and abstractions of hundreds of writers. It is a mine for students of history, Christian mission, caste, South India and colonialism. The specialist will probably say, 'I know all this, but I never looked at it quite this way before.' That is Bayly's gift: a different perspective.

Susan Visvanathan

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Comment

Violence in Punjab

PRAMOD KUMAR

MORE than ten thousand people have fallen victim to terrorism in Punjab, a number unrivalled by terrorist activity anywhere in the world. So traumatising are the memories of these ten years that no one – political actors, social activists and even academics – has bothered to discuss the reasons responsible for the violence and the return of 'peace'. Thus, whenever a violent event, like the assassination of Chief Minister Beant Singh takes place, it raises uncomfortable questions about 'peace' and the re-emergence of militancy. The projection of a Beant Singh or a K.P.S Gill as symbols of peace has meant that their successes are greeted with jubilation while their setbacks lead to panic. These extreme reactions are natural in a situation where individuals are isolated from the political, socio-economic setting and presented either as heroes or as villains.

This kind of understanding attributes an autonomous space to state and non-state actors, overlooking the latent violence. The main focus is to target individual perpetrators of violence. In other words, the police eliminate the militants and vice-versa and even the judiciary isolates individual policemen for punishment. A vicious circle is thus set up, where the underlying assumption is that the killing of a lone terrorist or the punishing of a few policemen will result in the elimination of terrorism *per se*.

Terrorism is not merely a state of mind: it is a political strategy. If the state wants to silence the gun, it must confront the politics and ideology of terrorism. As long as the creed or basic causes that gave rise to it continue to flourish, the danger is that terrorism can erupt again. The basic flaw of the state's strategy in dealing with the Punjab

problem was viewing terrorism as a law and order problem. In such a context, violence becomes a 'truncated object' of study because it confines itself to state and non-state actors, precluding the need to understand violence as a part of a historical process. But it is important to remember that violence is a result of certain social conditions and inseparable from the existence and functioning of social and political institutions. For example, the return of peace to Punjab does not imply that the conditions which caused violence have been moderated, subsumed, or resolved. Therefore, it is incorrect to see the escalating violence as a result of an inadequate police apparatus alone.

This is not to deny the law and order dimension of terrorism. But we must remember that to check the democratic mobilisations against terrorism in the name of security alone strengthens the forces of terrorism. Therefore, the recent assassination of Chief Minister Beant Singh should not scare away moderate politicians: this will only strengthen the hold of the hard-liners and extremists. A legitimate question we need to ask is: is violence being used as a substitute for democratic modes by the state as well as non-state actors, or is it being used as one of the tactics which ranged from ideological persuasion to violence?

In order to advance a conceptual framework we must therefore: (a) analyse the reasons, justifications and manifestations of violence; (b) make an assessment of the nature, character and longevity of peace in Punjab; and (c) suggest an alternate approach to understand and counter violence.

Historically, violence in Punjab has been considered a legitimate mode of political discourse. Both cultural and

religious practice have attributed a positive value to the use of violence for retrieving dignity and fighting evil. The Sikh religious tradition legitimizes the use of violence, provided it has its basis in human values. But a militancy based on humanism was subordinated to martial militancy by vested interests. The British strategy of creating 'martial races' based on caste and religion reinforced the concept of martial militancy.

In order to understand violence in its proper social context and as a part of the fermentation in the ideological state apparatus, we must remember its history. Only then can we trace the relationship of both individual and state violence with the underlying social structure.

Punjab has a history of movements which used violence as a method of interest articulation and received a positive response from the people. For instance, the Namdhari or Kooka movement, launched in 1858 by Baba Ram Singh at Baini Sahib, in Ludhiana district, was militant and anti-imperialist in character. The Ghadar Lehar was another militant movement launched in the USA (1913-1918), whose main thrust was also anti-imperialist. Most of the Ghadarites later joined the Communist Party and even the Naxalites. The Babbar Akalis were anti-imperialists and believed in physical elimination of British agents and informers. Another party (the Red Communist Party) also used violence as a mode of discourse in PEPSU in the pre-independence phase, organizing a number of violent peasant struggles in the Phulkian states. Although this mode of political discourse persisted all through, it became a dominant element only in the post-1980 phase.

These historical conditions and their interaction with the state apparatus have given rise to structural violence which manifested itself in state and individual violence. They were, variously, articulations of a secular Punjabi identity, antagonistic assertions of communal identities and distinct religious identities. The conflicts between these identities, the partisan nature of politics and a lop-sided growth of the economy provided a fillip to retrogressive violent action.

All these competing identities co-existed. For instance, Punjab has a culture and language which transcends religious group boundaries and a unified politico-administrative unit tried to integrate the diverse religious, caste and other identities. Despite the formulation and reformulation of a composite linguistic cultural consciousness, the tendency to evolve a unified sub-nationality with a common urge for territorial integrity remained weak in Punjab. On the contrary, politics mobilized people along communal lines resulting in the Partition in 1947 and, in 1966, a division of the Punjabi-speaking people.

In the pre-independence phase, reformatory movements like the Arya Samaj, the Singh Sabha movement and the Ahmadiya, with their emphasis on *shuddhi*, *amrit prachar*, *tabligh* and *tanzim*, blurred the real contradictions and promoted religiosity and differentiation among people.

In fact, the British colonial government made conscious efforts to shape communal identities, and British historians like Mill, Elphinstone and Elliot, reinforced the perceptions of communal monoliths. Constitutional changes – such as the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909, the Montague-Chelmsford reforms of 1919 and the Act of 1937, incorporating principles of separate electorates and communal reservations, perpetuated and intensified this communal polarization.

The shift in the content and form of politics from mass involvement to elite manoeuvres and calculations accentuated communal divisions which adversely affected the formation of a secular Punjabi identity. It is, therefore, relevant to point out that the British colonial politics of separate communal electorates and encouragement to communal organizations, accentuated the reality of communalism.

This process could not be reversed even after independence. The interactions between the state and structural reality shaped communal articulations but it could not become dominant because non-communal assertions also co-existed. Politics reinforced the assumption that both Sikhs and Hindus have distinct interests and demands. The most obvious example of this was the Hindi agitation and the Punjabi Suba movement when linguistic and regional issues were articulated but only within a communal frame. Communally divisive politics and exclusiveness thus emerged as a dominant mode of political activity.

There was also an aggregation of groups on categories other than communal, that is, primarily around class and language. An estimated 47 per cent of Punjabi Hindus, according to the 1971 Census, claimed Punjabi as their mother-tongue, at a time when even the language question had been communalised. This clearly demonstrated that Punjabi as a sub-nationality has its own inner dynamism. The objective conditions thus thwarted the communal politics initiated by mainstream parties.

In this context, the multi-cultural character of Punjabi society was unable to express itself in the practice of politics and impact the state structure. This was a blow to the state's claim to the allegiance of its members and also to the claim to some conception of a shared purpose or a sense of shared benefits. In other words, denied access to their own language, culture and resources alienated a large section of the people from the state, their culture and language and their own physical and material resource base. This process of alienation concealed a dormant violence.

The path of development on which the state embarked and the consequent denial of the legitimate claims of the people produced conditions of structural disequilibrium. The differentiation in the economy sharpened political assertions. The political discourse and symbolism, followed in the pre-1966 period, found continuity but the political programme represented sectional interests. In short, the danger to the *panth* of Sikhs as a single political entity having common secular interests found expression in the political

discourse of three Akali Dal factions, but the demands raised were more economic than political in nature. This became visible in the latter half of the 1980s.

The three trends within the Akali Dal can be identified as (i) standing for state autonomy, but without unduly disturbing the existing political arrangement; (ii) demanding self-determination within the constitutional framework; and (iii) raising the slogan for Khalistan. This made it difficult for the various Akali factions to group themselves under one banner. Political demagogues used communal and religious symbols in an extreme form to outdo or eliminate each other and to increase their support base for greater leverage in politics. This provided an ideological cover for the use of violence to register claims.

This situation was further complicated by the penetration of the green revolution, whose growth created agricultural surpluses which were not converted into an investment in industry. The green revolution was not a total strategy and it did not throw up organic inter-sectoral linkages. The surpluses generated did provide an assured market to consumer goods, but did not provide channels for profitable investment of these surpluses in industry and trade.

Similarly, although the state provided opportunities and access to education, creating in turn a large employable work-force, it did not create conditions and opportunities of employment. Rising unemployment, growing disparities of wealth and incomes leading to unequal conditions for availing of opportunities and poverty gave rise to individual and social anger. A sense of deprivation seized vast masses and bred insecurity and fear. It became easy for retrogressive ideologies to flourish in such an atmosphere. In the absence of alternative progressive political and cultural mobilizations, political parties seduced the people by exploiting this situation.

The green revolution reinforced the phenomenon of relative poverty. The high cost of living in Punjab, as compared to Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan from where most of its migrant labour comes, has accentuated the socio-economic crises of the local landless labour. The preference for the low-paid migrant labourers also contributed to new political alignments within the Akali Dal.

Another development was the impact of the green revolution on religious practices and beliefs. In the absence of rational explanations about the riches of some and rags for many, the common man responded to theories of fatalism and superstitious beliefs. The growth of religious fundamentalism had its roots in rapid modernization which was exploited by the likes of Bhindranwale. Thus, cultural and social development could not keep pace with the prosperity brought about by the green revolution.

The green revolution strategy, however, provided a basis for the growth of social tensions. But the economic differentiation within the peasantry and between emerging agrarian interests and urban trading and industrial bourgeoisie, weakened the assertions of a communal based nation-

ality. In other words, the demand for an independent Sikh state could not find a forceful expression in political discourse and was raised as a slogan by a marginal political leadership: mainstream political forces did not articulate the demand for Khalistan.

The demand for Khalistan did not acquire mass support despite the unimaginative and ruthless political and administrative initiatives and the protagonists' brutal and senseless killings. This was because the historical process weakened the communal-based national identity and strengthened the Punjabi sub-national identity. However, this does not imply that the formation of *Khalistan* (not Khalistan identity) can be overruled. In short, the question of Khalistan must be addressed not on grounds of political and economic feasibility, but on the forces inherent in the social processes which may shape and nurture such an idea.

This situation is also linked to the various identities which are taking shape in South Asia. They are on the one hand an impetus to slogans like Khalistan and on the other, provide conditions for the growth of a larger Punjabi identity transcending territorial boundaries. This could challenge identities based only on religion, and provide a new impetus to those based on language and culture.

The most visible dimension providing support to the so-called Khalistan movement seems to be an external stimulus. This has two inter-related components: one is the problem of rootless emigrant people who could multiply their wealth but were unable to find corresponding social respectability and political power in the country of their origin. It is also argued that hostile Indo-Pakistan relations and growing imperialist penetration in the region are influencing, to a large extent, answers to the 'Khalistan question'. The protagonists of Khalistan hope that the Sikhs will effectively intervene and restructure the geography of the region.

The Khalistan movement may be relatively stronger in USA, UK and Canada, but it merely exists as a slogan within Punjab. It is the demand for greater state autonomy that is the central issue in Punjab politics. The main political party, i.e. Akali Dal, raised this demand in 1973 and it became a movement around 1978. The interactive relationship between state and structural realities reinforced the need for greater autonomy for the regional and sub-nationalities, but the political response to this demand was greater centralisation of power. The concentration of power in individuals has reduced their capacity to resolve or even accommodate social and economic interests. This process makes institutions irrelevant and individuals powerless. In a situation of non-fulfilment of genuine and legitimate demands, these individuals are identified as the source of popular discontent and, therefore, the target of cumulative frustration and anger. The increasing trend of assassinating political opponents rather than questioning the basic structure is a result of centralisation of political power in the hands of individuals.

All these factors still persist. The ground reality continues to produce a dwarfed secular Punjabi identity; a blocked economy still finds it difficult to accommodate emerging agrarian interests and create greater employment opportunities, leading to a politics which is not representative, competitive and federal.

Much of the politics in Punjab has been shaped by the conflicts in various class factions of the ruling elite. The basic thrust of this politics during the last decade was (i) an appeasement of extremist sections; (ii) making democratic methods of interest articulation ineffective and rendering moderate politics irrelevant; (iii) negotiating with various political groups for sharing political power without addressing the real issues; (iv) undermining the norms of competitive politics by dismissing popularly elected governments and not holding elections (The elections to the state assembly were postponed on the pretext that voting would be influenced by the gun. Incidentally, parties opposing the elections secured more than 61 per cent of the votes in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections but they still opposed the elections to the state legislatures.); and (v) after the Akalis boycotted the 1991 state assembly elections, they ceased to be perceived as a threat to legislative politics. This brought about a qualitative shift in politics: consensus against terrorism became a reality.

The excessive use of physical force and frequent misuse of para-military forces to resolve political-economic issues have provided legitimacy to such actions and prevented non-violent tactics, such as fasts. In such a situation, the terrorists in Punjab shared a grievance with the wider community which give them social recognition. Moreover, staged encounters and non-trial of individuals by the courts made a mockery of the judicial system.

Delays in trial and the harassment caused to the innocent, are examples of state malfunctioning and insensitivity. The prevalence of underground economic activity and the cultural affinities of the migrant population of west Punjab with the people in the adjoining villages of Pakistan, accelerated the process of criminalization under a communal environment which soon acquired legitimacy. In a nutshell: a perception of deprivation, the criminalization of politics, lack of representation in the participatory political institutions, and above all, the absence of progressive social and political mobilization gave an impetus to the growth of terrorism in this region.

The strategy adopted by the militants and state was the same: both attempted to acquire legitimacy and outdo the adversary in this process.

In the initial phase, extremist politics derived its legitimacy from the 'Amrit Prachar' movement. A latent reservoir of fervour generated by the use of religion in politics was to shape the new terms of political discourse. In the past this process was encouraged both by Akalis and the Congress. Though it was a dominant trend in the pre-Blue Star Operation days, it persisted till 1990.

In the second phase, the militants used force to acquire legitimacy. A number of panthic edicts like a dress code for the children, a teaching code for the teachers, language, medical, industrial, water, election, gurdwara, Khalsa panchayat, electricity, banking, revenue and civil bureaucracy codes were promulgated by the militants. Their enforcement made the militants unpopular. This phase also saw the humiliation of members of Sikh religious groups by a section of militants, alienating them from their support base. The state, on the other hand, worked towards isolating the militants and appeared more legitimate in the process. Another strategy adopted by the militants was to communalise the situation. The state continued to draw upon the reservoir of mistrust and suspicion existing amongst 'communities' but at the same time responded to the demand for 'stability' raised by the middle class.

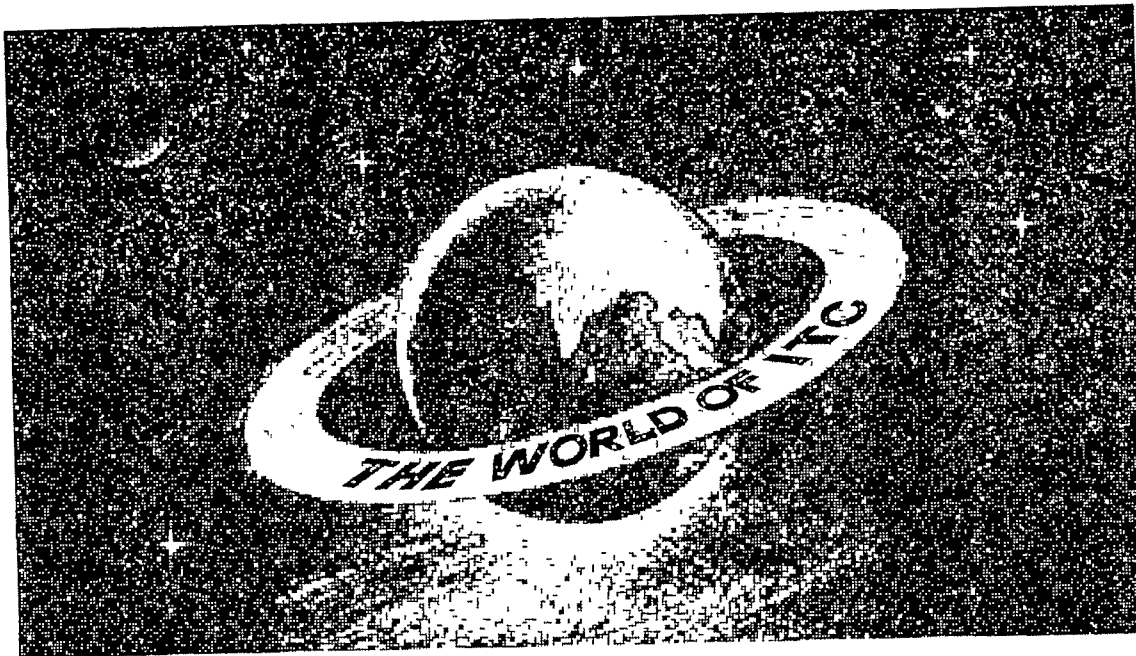
Thirdly, the state continued successfully to build up a political consensus against terrorism. On the other hand, the militants were a fragmented group, unable to present a united front.

Fourthly, though foreign support to militancy was available, there was no systematic support for 'Khalistan'.

The consequences of this strategy were that (a) The emphasis was on competing legitimacy and not on legitimacy acquired by involvement of the masses in politics. This alienated the people both from the state and the militants, leading them to choose the lesser evil; (b) There was a communalisation of social practices by the main actors, thereby undermining constitutional provisions and evading social responsibility; (c) The political consensus that emerged was forced, and not evolved, and (d) the question of human rights was approached from a partisan angle. In the process, society was counter-posed to the state and vice-versa.

Thus, even though 'peace' has returned, the conditions which generated violence still remain. The interaction of a multi-cultural social reality and the mono-cultural nature of the state is fraught with tensions. The new economic policy with its emphasis on globalisation of capital, without ensuring mobility of labour, may provide communal, ethnic or regional cover to such tensions. A transformational political discourse has been replaced by status-quoist politics, marginalising a large section of people. All this is likely to further compound the crisis. A 'structural transformation' of the economy is the specific need of Punjab. The revival of competitive politics and a functioning administration are important conditions for ensuring peace in Punjab.

In conclusion, with the re-emergence of violent forms of protest in the context of a denial of cultural autonomy, distributive economic justice, non-functioning democratic institutions and norms of democratic politics, a greater reliance on the repressive state apparatus cannot be ruled out. Whether peace can survive in such an atmosphere is the question.



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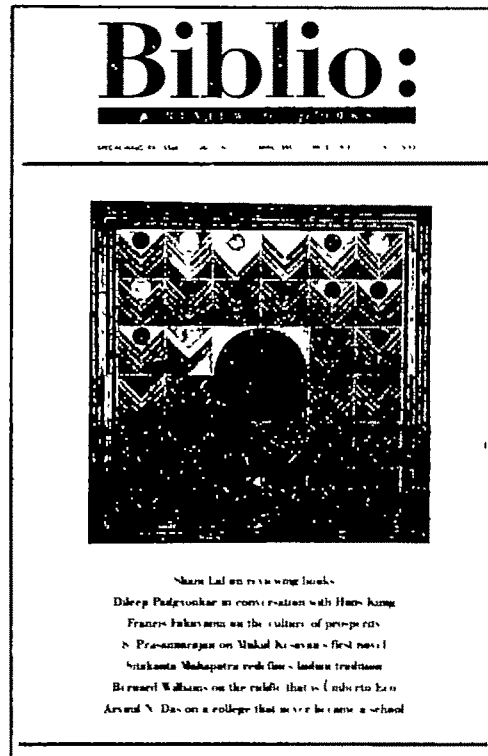
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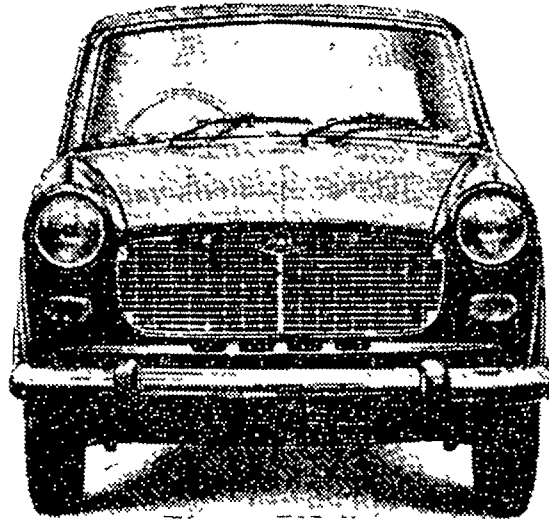
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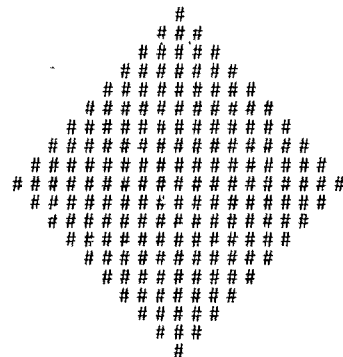
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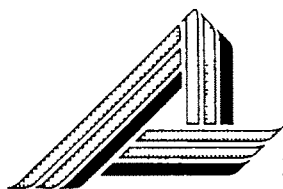
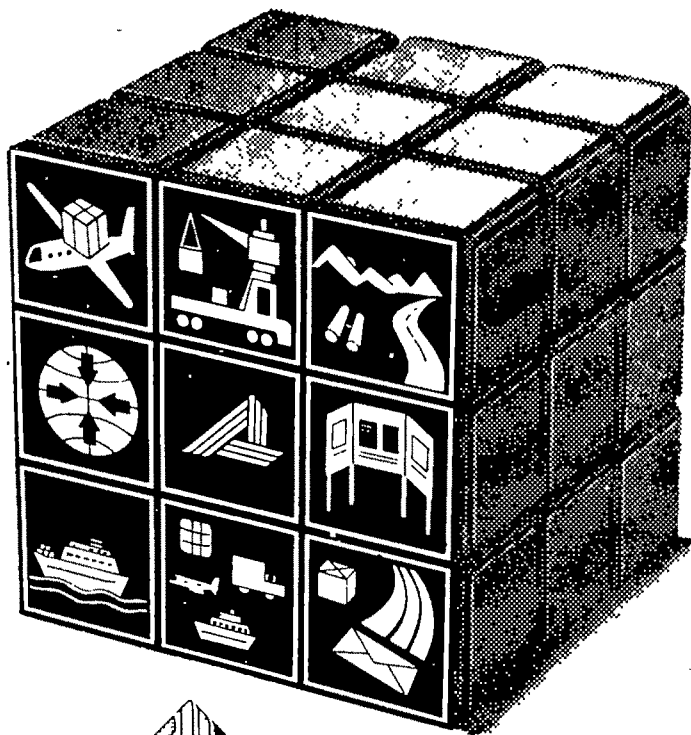
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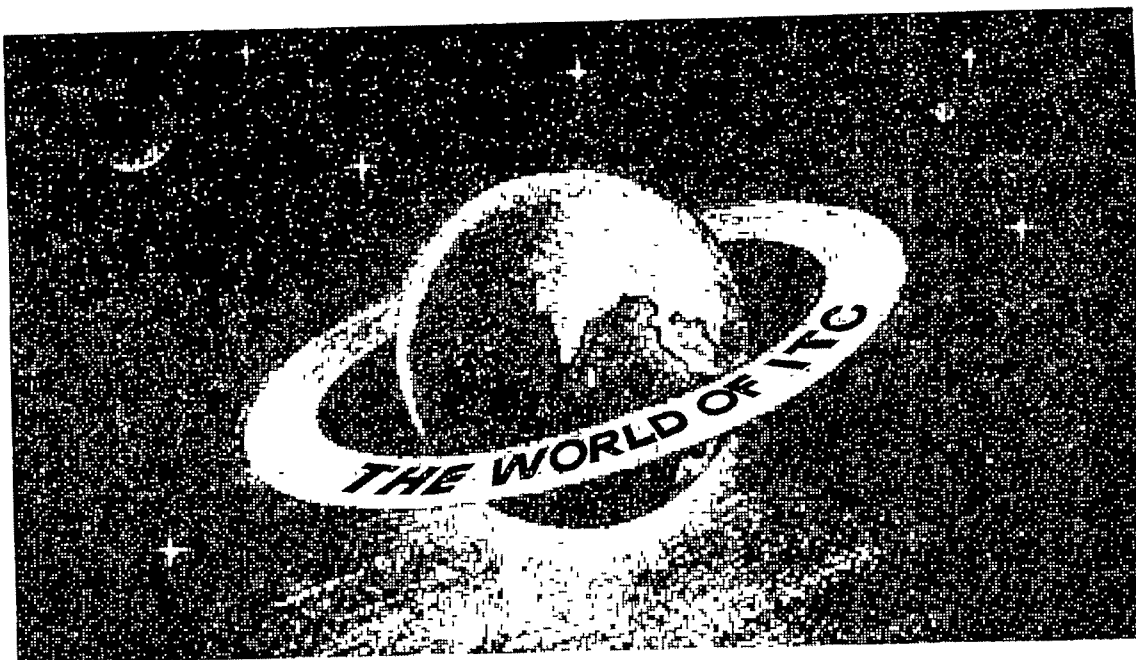
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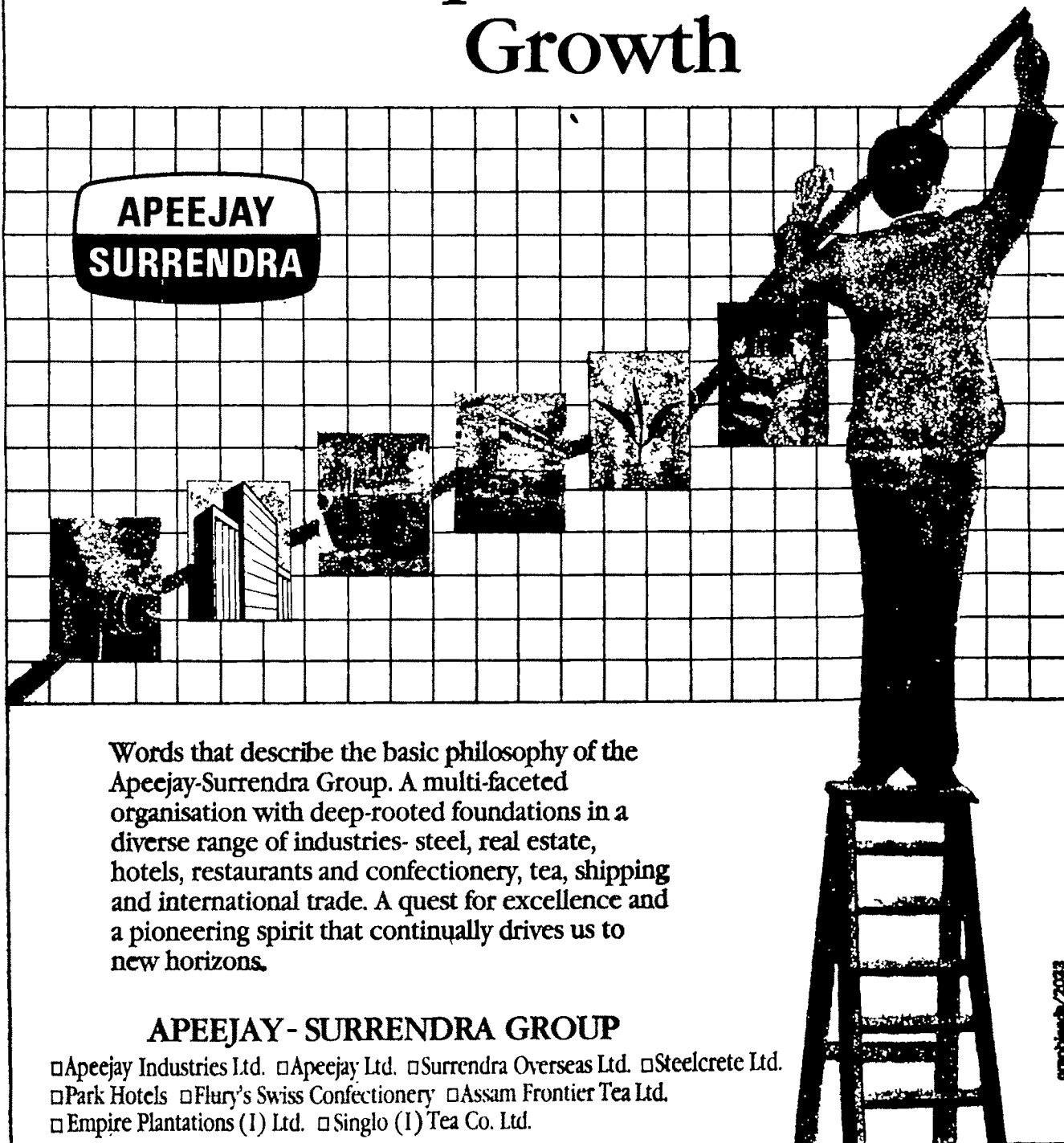
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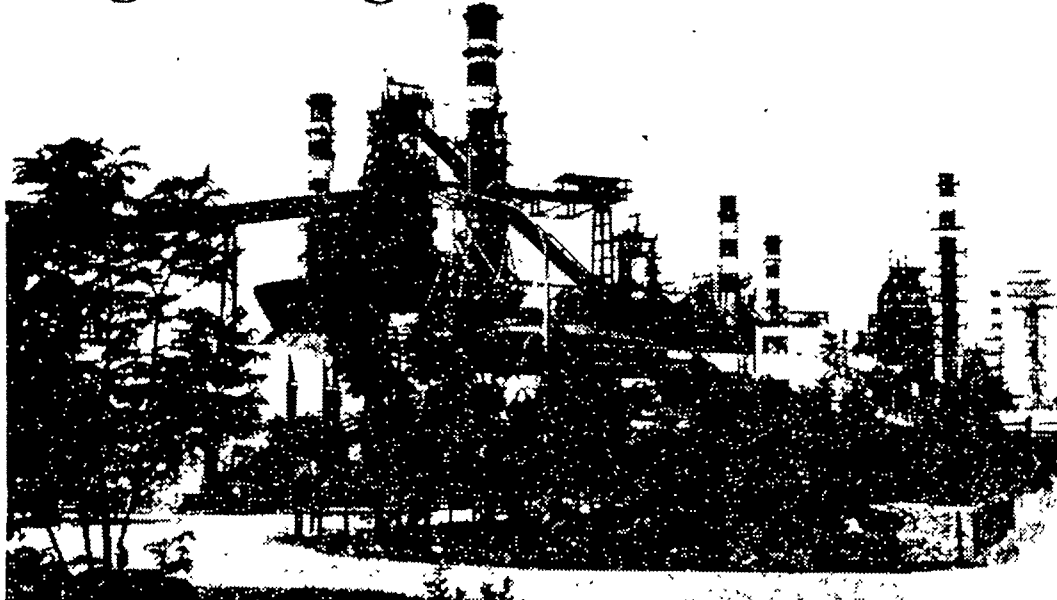
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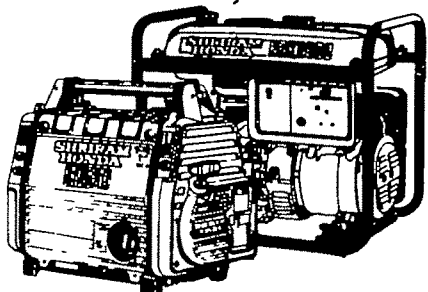
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NEXT MONTH: ALTERNATIVES IN EDUCATION

435

THE LIMITS OF TOLERANCE

a symposium on

the need for living harmoniously

in a multicultural society

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The problem

TWO statements are often made about Indians: one that they are ridiculously tolerant of corruption, venality, immorality and inefficiency and two, that they are the most intolerant race in the world when it comes to compassion, sharing and sensitivity towards the downtrodden and those of another caste or faith.

Ironically, both statements are true. The political atmosphere that flourishes, the touts and hustlers, the dowry-seekers, the bride-burners, the evaders of taxes .. all are accepted. Yet we are violently militant toward illegal immigrants, minorities and people of other faiths, behaving like bullies against the minority communities. We vote for liberalisation and progress and want instead the status quo and the good old days. Are we as mixed up as we sound or is there some way in which our tolerance and intolerance can be reassessed? What, in short, are the limits of tolerance and when does tolerance turn into intolerance?

The answer lies in confronting all issues honestly. For too long have we hidden behind platitudes and homilies that pussyfoot around contentious problems and sought

solutions which in order to please all, end up pleasing none. Have we ever had the courage to ask the Hindus (or the party that purports to represent them) what they really want of Muslims? Has anyone dared to ask Muslims the same question in reverse? Has anyone had the courage to address the question of reservations strictly on the basis of social justice rather than in terms of votes? So is it courage that we are really talking about or tolerance? Does this mean that tolerance is a convenient way of avoiding unpleasant confrontations? Has tolerance reached a saturation point? Or does tolerance mean an unlimited and unqualified capacity of forbearance? This issue of SEMINAR tries to explore such questions.

Some may feel, and perhaps with reason, that these mixed attitudes to tolerance arise from the heritage of faith and religion in this country. All the major religions of this land—Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism—believe in the law of Karma. This translated to the lowest common denominator means that divine, not human, intervention changes things, which breeds a fatalistic attitude that makes people

shrug and say, 'What else can we expect in the age of Kaliyuga?' The passivity with which we have accepted exploitation leads one to believe that certainly cultural attitudes engendered by religious indoctrination have emasculated the nation. We are, in one sense, victims of our cultural past.

But this is nonsense and we know it. No religion, however tolerant and passive, has ever condoned immorality and inaction. So the fault lies not in our stars, as Shakespeare said, but in us that we are underlings. We have lost our capacity to mark the limits of tolerance. We have neither the political leadership that would provide direction, nor faith in our religious clergy to outline an ethical framework for right behaviour, nor are we sufficiently liberated from our cultural identities to believe in the cult of individual right and wrong.

The greatest irony, of course, lies in the fact that every day we pass by human suffering, poverty and squalor and it does not move us at all. We ignore the tapping of the old beggar on the car window, step over

sleeping bodies on pavements, place handkerchiefs over our noses to staunch the smell of the jhuggies from assailing us. Intolerant behaviour would you say? Most certainly not. That we reserve for matters relating to personal law, freedom of speech, expression and movement

Salman Rushdie has to make but a passing swipe and the Shiv Sena bays for his blood; Mani Ratnam has to seek clearance from political supremos before his film can be released, a panel in an exhibition on Rama by Sahmat can lead to its closure; we want all Muslim squatters out, we are quick to lay down norms for sexual behaviour, blithely unaware that the tracts we quote are themselves full of contrary examples

What we are fast losing is our capacity to live and let live – a philosophy that is as sound as it is simple. If we believe we are what we are, we should let others be what they are. Rowdy, assertive claims about what is right behaviour can hardly be made by those who are very often wrong themselves.

Sustainable suffering

NIRMALANGSHU MUKHERJI

THERE are many aspects of our lives which we do not commonly share with strangers. Call these our 'personal' aspects. Yet 'personal' need not be too narrowly understood to include just a solitary individual. Sometimes, of course, I am exclusively concerned with myself. But my concerns about my wife involve at least two individuals. Some of my other personal concerns involve even more people. I also have deep concerns as an academician, as a citizen, as a Bengali and so on, each of which I often share with complete strangers. I will call these, somewhat indiscriminately, my 'social/political' concerns. Especially in view of recent feminist theorizing, I do not intend any theoretically sharp distinction between the social and the personal.

Amidst growing strife and mounting tension, it is natural for a discussion on tolerance to turn into a discussion on intolerance. We think of the Babri masjid and the Bombay blasts and we shift to topics such as the role of the state, rights and liberties, origins of violence and virtues of non-violence, solidarity, extremism, discrimination and dissent. Such angry topics then naturally dominate discussions of moral and social issues in the country.

Nevertheless, while focusing on heavy issues, we become insensitive to the value and complexity of our personal lives where some of the moral issues find their deepest expression. We are then left to seek all morality and all goodness in our political lives alone. Psychoanalysts like Erich Fromm testify to the resulting mess in our psyche.

In any case, a large majority of people have little interest in or access to the heavy political issues that engage the intelligentsia. Most people are engaged

most of the time in making sense of their own lives in relation to their immediate families, friends, neighbours, colleagues and the like. Their actions are largely evaluated in such local setting and their critical sense of what is right and good is often restricted there as well. For larger political issues, most people essentially follow the word and the crowd. I am not recommending this state of affairs; I am taking this to be a fact of life in any corner of history. So if these people are to make moral sense of their lives, an examination of moral issues must enter their personal domains which seldom find heroic expression.

Sometimes it is obvious if an issue is personal or social in the senses suggested above. For example, the issues of death or loneliness are essentially personal. Issues regarding the morality of war or nuclear energy, on the other hand, are very clearly social. So for these issues the divide between the personal and the social need not be carefully marked since they belong to only one of the sides, as the case may be, of the divide.

Some issues, however, span *across* the divide in that they arise both for the individual as embedded in his local setting and for the larger social groups to which he belongs. Classical issues of moral philosophy such as those of responsibility, dignity, obligation, loyalty, sacrifice, freedom *and* tolerance typically belong to this class. If we are not careful in locating the divide in discussing these issues, we might confuse our social concerns with the personal, and vice-versa, to end up with rather simplistic versions of human nature.

For example, a large majority of people may be said to be leading morally

unworthy lives if their lives are to be judged on the social count alone. Most people fail to fulfil their social obligations and responsibilities, lack any discernible social dignity, shy away from sacrifice, do not enjoy any significant social freedom and, as we will see, fail to exhibit genuine social tolerance.

Are the majority of people then morally bankrupt or do they appear to be so only because we are demanding moral clarity on only those aspects of their lives over which they have the least control? Since we have a greater control over our personal lives, we enjoy significant moral privilege in our local setting despite our social failings; *that* privilege is seldom denied. Our moral worth thus lies primarily in what we do with this privilege.

Bertrand Russell once suggested that in launching an enquiry it is a wholesome idea to stock the mind with as many puzzles as possible. Keeping to examples in moral philosophy, consider what is classically known as the paradox of obligation. Fulfilling a duty is a significant moral act only when it is done freely. Doing an act freely implies that one has a choice of not doing it. However, duties preclude that choice: duties *must* be fulfilled. Is the fulfilment of duty then a moral act at all? Does it make sense to praise someone for fulfilling a duty? Our concept of obligation is clarified as we reach satisfactory answers to these questions.

Consider the following pair of theses which we may take to be facts about personal tolerance:

(a) Tolerance is invariably accompanied by *suffering* since the question of tolerating what we enjoy does not arise. Therefore, as we tolerate more, we suffer more.
(b) As we grow older, we become progressively more tolerant or, in terms of this seminar, we expand the limits of our tolerance. In effect, as we age, we tolerate more.

Combining (a) and (b) it follows that the later part of our lives is *invariably* one of great suffering. This conclusion is puzzling. Most older people, despite their gout or cough, actually seem to lead a life

of bliss. Factually then suffering in old age is not inevitable; morally, a life of bliss is always desirable particularly in old age. How do we square up these factual and moral expectations with (a) and (b)? For the rest of this paper, I will try to disentangle some of the central issues which surround this problem.

First of all, we must convince ourselves that (a) and (b) are indeed factually salient. For example, is tolerance always accompanied by suffering? The suffering at issue may be mild as when we (cheerfully) tolerate the pranks of children, especially our own. The suffering need not be of a physical kind although, in extreme cases, they may lead to physical suffering, headaches for instance. This happens when we tolerate uncomfortable ideas, language, music, customs, attitudes and the like. We will look into these cases with more details as we proceed. In general then, whatever the form and the degree of suffering, tolerance begets suffering. So increasing tolerance must lead to increasing suffering, other things being equal. Unabated suffering, in any form, is not desirable. By the time we reach old age, therefore, such suffering must ultimately lead to misery.

As for the second fact, it is commonplace that, compared to an earlier age, we learn to take many more things in stride as we mature without there being a change in the *causes* themselves. A needle always hurts. Yet while children scream at the very sight of a needle, adults hardly grimace. The reasons for which teenagers break into massive fights seem fairly tolerable later on. Notice also that the limits of tolerance *progressively* expand. Children of the same age hardly tolerate each others' pranks, older children will tolerate identical pranks from younger siblings, parents, of course, tolerate much more but grandparents often do better.

Perhaps we are gathering only convenient facts. Perhaps schoolchildren tolerate more domination by adults than college students. Since we have already accepted the first thesis relating tolerance to suffering, we can use that now to examine (apparent) counter-examples

Psychologists sometimes claim, and parents and teachers, of course, readily agree, that younger children often *desire and need* domination of the kinder variety. As long as such domination is in demand, it is questionable whether these children *suffer*. If they don't, then the concept of tolerance does not properly apply in this case. The moment they begin to suffer under such domination they cease to tolerate although they might fail to express their intolerance. We examine this point in detail later. As these children grow even older, they come to tolerate similar, perhaps even worse, domination in life. So the second thesis that tolerance grows in time has not been refuted so far.

Theses (a) and (b) then appear to be sound. How then do we escape the puzzling conclusion that aging is inevitably accompanied by increased misery? One option here, as with most puzzles, is to bite the bullet and accept the conclusion as it stands. So instead of challenging the conclusion we should be resigned to the idea that old age *is* miserable, the perceived bliss is illusory. In fact, it could be suggested that a rather pessimistic view of old age is not surprising at all since it is fairly natural and is widely held in a variety of traditions.

For example, this view could even be a consequence of an otherwise shining view of life promoted in the Romantic tradition. Romantics held that youth was the pinnacle of human life. A series of images upheld this view – impatient, intolerant, innovative and unbending. Beginning as angels, we reach our godly best by about the age of thirty. What follows thereafter is progressive degeneration in every respect. We need not examine the merits of the Romantic tradition since, even outside that tradition – that is, in traditions with a less flattering view of youth – an apprehension about old age is, nonetheless, widely held.

A large part of this apprehension has, no doubt, to do with the increasing proximity of death as we age. Perhaps the growing presence of death creates a sense of detachment in our minds, as we begin to perceive the futility of much

that engaged us before. This gradual change in our minds possibly makes us more tolerant in at least one sense of the term. Despite the obvious human interest of these connections, I will not discuss them here primarily because these themes have a tendency to fly out of analytical control unless we use ample space. So, for the time being, let us keep to the mundane.

Even then a part of our uneasiness with old age is certainly linked, if not directly to the prospect of death, to the prospects of diminishing freedom to break out of our current predicaments. A lack of freedom to change our course of life forces increasing tolerance which, in turn, leads to increased suffering. The conclusion of the puzzle thus merely reinforces a fairly standard view of old age. If we are pessimistic enough, the puzzle disappears. Notice also that the view, not surprisingly, upholds a rather defeatist view of tolerance: tolerance is associated with dependence, helplessness, lack of freedom and a lot of sighs.

I think there are several problems with the option just covered. The first problem is an existential one: the option requires that we write a significant portion of our life off even before we have lived it. Moreover, if we have learnt to abhor the very idea of old age before living it and since, untimely death apart, we must step into this age, then we *will* end up in great misery.

I guess there must be a (Skinnerian conditioning) fable somewhere in which someone was told about his imminent transfer to hell. Then the person was actually transferred to heaven but he kept on screaming nonetheless because he dared not open his eyes. Actual experiences of later life, fortunately, sometimes soothe our frayed expectations: a sudden parting of the clouds, a blissful breath of air. But often they are of too little significance and too late. So something needs to be done *before* the onset of old age.

Yet raising an existential problem is not giving an *argument* against the pessimist. Since old age *is* bad, the pes-

simist will ask, why deceive ourselves? Why not get used to the idea that old age is not worth living? However, I am going to argue that if we agree with the pessimist at this point, we must also agree that *no* age is worth living.

Notice that thesis (b) does not mention any particular age, young or old; it simply says that we suffer more as we proceed. Of course, the thesis has its sharpest effect on old age, as we saw. But this final effect is just an accumulation of previous effects. If the final convulsions of the drug-addict are bad, the little pricks which led to this state couldn't have been good. Following his own course then the pessimist must concede that the very phenomenon of growing up is miserable, *living* is miserable. Such a global pessimism, amounting to outright *nihilism*, was no part of his argument earlier.

Earlier, the pessimist was interested in rejecting the value only of old age since he felt secure, perhaps under the fountain of youth, that all the glory he needs can be acquired before he gets to that sorry stage. But now the effects of thesis (b) are coming home to roost. If anything, the pessimist now needs to find a different argument (namely, one that defends outright nihilism). When an argument for outright nihilism is in fact offered, we may decide not to enter it. On the other hand, the pessimist will be changing the game if he now plans to offer a restricted version of thesis (b) such that it applies only to old-age. Again we may decide not to play this game since we are concerned with the *given* version of thesis (b).

Let me illustrate the somewhat untidy methodological point raised above with a more familiar issue. Suppose someone makes an appeal against the killing of living things for food and demands a ban on animal-slaughter. This person will be secure in his knowledge that vegetables abound. However, when the effect of his appeal is traced to vegetables as well, he cannot demand a similar ban on vegetables (that leaves nothing to eat) *unless* he offers new arguments for the virtues of starving to death. Such arguments will be plainly pointless since we are engaged in

deciding on how to survive *without* feeling guilty. Alternatively, he could come up with some new, restrictive notion of life (feeling of pain, mobility among others) that, he hopes, includes just the living things he wishes to protect. Those who entertain a more general notion of life will lose interest at this point.

The puzzle then cannot be meaningfully solved by granting the conclusion. So the only option currently at hand is to go back to theses (a) and (b) for another close look. Recall that the damaging effect of the conclusion really flows from the global nature of thesis (b) which the pessimist failed to spot. Yet, there is nothing *intrinsically* damaging in the idea that we grow more tolerant as we grow old. If 'growing more tolerant' is something akin to 'becoming kinder', then thesis (b) actually encapsulates a nice prospect.

It is only in conjunction with thesis (a) that thesis (b) acquires its notoriety. Once we concede that tolerance embodies suffering, increasing tolerance will be accompanied by increased suffering and the rest of the consequences follow. Thesis (b) then is both natural and benign; it is thesis (a) which requires a closer look if we wish to escape the puzzle at all. As far as I can see, that exercise, in turn, requires a closer look at the notion of suffering at issue.

Recall that children who find domination by adults intolerable sometimes fail to express their intolerance. This, of course, is a widespread phenomenon not restricted to children alone: unexpressed intolerance abounds in our civic life. The point is: a failure to *express* intolerance should not be taken as a sign of continued tolerance.

I think our common notion of tolerance is fairly confused on this point. Sometimes we do say things like 'I must do something about it. I can't tolerate it any more,' meaning that we have tolerated something *until* we have made a protest. In such cases, a protest typically takes one of the following forms: raising one's voice and maybe one's arm, writing a letter to the editor, filing a lawsuit, casting an

angry vote, organising a march, forming an association and the like.

I will be facing an intolerable situation if I am tied to a chair with a gun placed near my head. Yet, in this situation, I am not likely to protest in *any* of the forms listed above. Have I *tolerated* my predicament especially when, *ex hypothesi*, my situation would have been intolerable? I do not think I have shown tolerance under the circumstances; all I have shown is helplessness, maybe even cowardice. The point can be strengthened by including, in the list of forms of protest, something like *inner protest*. While I was tied down I could have been planning retaliation once I get a chance, i.e., I could have been *waiting* to adopt one of the forms of outer protest. If that is the case, then I have not tolerated my situation at any point at all. A show of tolerance then cannot be inferred even from a complete absence of outer protest. Why then do we sometimes (confusingly) use the concept of tolerance in such cases? I will return to this question in a moment.

When I am tolerating I am no doubt suffering; this part of thesis (a) seems to me to be unquestionable. Yet when I am tolerating I am not protesting even in the widest sense of 'protest'. So I must be suffering willingly, *voluntarily*. Voluntary suffering must be rare in our social life and, therefore, such efforts are often heroic. During the early, idealistic phase of the Russian revolution, it is said that some capitalists, torn with guilt, actually threw the gates open willingly to face the wrath of the workers. Political activists often go to jail with full knowledge of imminent torture. These deeds are heroic because they are rare; most of us fail to reach such heights. Thus I doubt whether thesis (b) significantly applies to our social life.

In our ordinary civic life we sometimes exhibit social tolerance of a less heroic sort when we agree to stand in a long queue or follow (time-consuming) traffic rules or agree to pay tax. But notice we also exhibit severe *limits* of tolerance in these cases. Perhaps we do not even genuinely satisfy the component

of voluntariness on most occasions. Even when we do, our tolerance is fairly short-lived. We constantly review the point of such tolerance, we watch others closely and we weigh the consequences of our imminent intolerance. Each of these reveal an attitude of exasperation. I have no space here to discuss why we do so and I am certainly not questioning the moral value of protest. But the fact remains that in our social lives, heroic deeds apart, we fail to display genuine tolerance in the long run. Hence, our *claims* of tolerance, like much of our other claims in the social setting, are often full of hypocrisy. Who would like to miss the chance of flaunting a virtue especially when you can avoid practising it? This I hope explains why our concept of social tolerance is confusing.

While genuine social tolerance is rare, crawling like a horse with a baby on one's back is routine. We look forward to such suffering. Young aspirants in various fields invite and tolerate years of back-breaking practice. Parents tolerate hours of anxiety when their children go out. We sit quietly as the barber twists our heads around. We pay through our nose to get our cavities filled. We listen to long stretches of unwelcome music or gossip or lectures. In fact, as soon as we turn to our personal lives, examples just flood in to show that our personal lives are filled with occasions for genuine tolerance. As our personal life widens and becomes more complex, such occasions multiply requiring, in turn, a growth in our tolerance. Thus both theses (a) and (b) have genuine applications in our local setting.

Yet our life does not necessarily become miserable as we grow. Since genuine tolerance has a voluntary component and is largely restricted to our personal lives, we have significantly more control here. In some sense, we *decide* to tolerate. So we may as well decide not to after a certain point. We may put the baby down when it really begins to hurt. We may defer going to the barber or ask for a shortcut. We use one of several available strategies: we avoid, we ignore, we break

away, we lose interest. Thus although we suffer and we learn to stretch the suffering, we seldom so stretch the suffering as to lead to personal unhappiness.

More importantly perhaps, as the examples suggest, suffering is almost always compensated with positive feelings of relief, happiness, pride, joy, expectation, achievement, importance and the like. This is the reason why we invite and look forward to such suffering. In most cases these feelings are aroused not only in the person tolerating but also in the person tolerated. So there is an altruistic element in tolerance as well. I tolerate because the child is happy. Altruism, as we all know, is largely restricted to our personal lives.

So the twin features of control and compensation make such suffering, to use current jargon, *sustainable*. In tolerance we display the brighter side of our lives. We combine courtesy and compassion with enough cunning to tame even suffering. This requires skills of living of the highest order. Despite strife and tension, the flow of life is such that most people are still able to perform reasonably well. Those who fail to do so end up in great misery.

What then is the solution to the puzzle? Recall that if the premises of the puzzle are true, then the conclusion 'as we grow old we suffer more' logically follows. This conclusion suggests an image of increased and ultimately unabated suffering necessarily accompanying growing up. That was the puzzling element which the conclusion inherited from the first premise alone. This unsufferable element may now be tamed with the notion of sustainable suffering. As we grow old we suffer more no doubt, but the suffering increases horizontally rather than vertically. We become tolerant about many more aspects of our complex lives while we slowly step out of those aspects on which we begin to lose control. Possibly in the end, we so deflate our local setting as to be able to step out of almost every aspect of our lives except the absolutely immediate ones.

Lessons in understanding

SHALINI ADVANI

Setting: A small privately owned school in Delhi

Scene: Morning assembly. A teacher tells a story to the assembled students.

The story:

A group of students were listening to a teacher in class. Suddenly someone shouted that an elephant was passing by. The children were very excited and ran out to see it. Only one boy remained seated. On noticing him the teacher asked why he too had not gone out. The boy replied that he had come to school to study, his role was to listen to the teacher with complete concentration and to ignore such things as elephants.

'Therefore children,' continues the teacher, 'if you wish to be successful students, you too must ignore distractions and listen carefully to what your teachers tell you.'

It is difficult to imagine a more apposite illustration of the functioning of the education system today. The overwhelming emphasis on listening passively to the teacher, on ignoring real life as it passes outside the window, is perfectly encapsulated in the valorisation of the student who sits in his seat and refuses to look at the elephant.

The institutionalised blinding of students to the variegated nature of experience is one of the greatest problems with the structure of education as it functions in India today. Educational failure at a number of levels is tacitly acknowledged in a variety of ways: in the plethora of government and state sponsored educa-

tion reports over the last five years, in the pronouncements of education ministers on the need for reform and even through the establishment of private initiatives such as the Parents Forum For Meaningful Education. The roots of this crisis are most commonly attributed to a widespread systemic failure: poorly trained teachers, an enormous syllabus, a faulty examination system, inadequate government expenditure, a lack of commitment to education in rural families and so on. Underlying each of these laments is the assumption that if only the system worked more efficiently we would automatically produce a nation of worthy and valuable citizens, that to be part of a smoothly functioning mainstream of education is invariably a good thing per se.

What is rarely acknowledged, however, is the fundamental problem with the very structure of knowledge which exists: with the construction of a normative world and the student's role within it; with the assumptions of a hegemonic and dominant ideology which functions even in the most efficient schools and does little to shape the tolerant, eclectic individuals essential to any democratic society. More than any other feature, the failure of education is a manifestation of the structure and hierarchy of knowledge which is transmitted; it is this which is responsible for boredom and cynicism in urban students and an appallingly high drop-out rate among rural students.

For a variety of complex causes endemic to the functioning of the system, 'knowledge' in the classroom is shaped not by teacher or student input but

entirely by the contents of the textbook. Rote learning of textbook knowledge is all a student needs to ensure high grades in the all-important examination system; conceptual learning or original ideas are accorded little respect. Equally, teachers adhere closely to the lessons in the textbook discouraging disputation or dissent by the student, both to ensure high pass grades and to obscure their often meagre knowledge behind a facade of institutional authority. Inevitably this prioritises structures of knowledge which are shaped by the educational bureaucracy and by a handful of textbook writers (most significantly, the NCERT and SCERTs). The monophonic promotion of a specific and dominant ideology as reflected in the textbook thus becomes intrinsic to the structure of the education system as a whole.

It would perhaps be reassuring to identify a single villainous class or group which controls the system with machiavellian finesse, which constructs a dominant ideology that is inflicted on unsuspecting students. The reality is unfortunately more complex – unfortunate because it is immeasurably more difficult to change. For instance, when the BJP governments in U.P. and Madhya Pradesh sought to alter the content of textbooks, it was not difficult to identify villainy and garner public opposition. In contrast, a more widespread and hugely problematic discourse continues to flourish in all books with silent efficacy.

The shaping and mis-shaping of young individuals occurs through textbooks in a variety of ways: through a narrowly articulated definition of national identity in a post-colonial society; in the functioning of traditionally patriarchal and bourgeois ideologies or in clichéd conceptions of religious, or class identity. Inevitably, the urban, middle-class student is reconfirmed in his assumptions of the world as he knows it; the student who is outside this elite group internalises to his cost a perception which dismisses local knowledge, imposes a flatly undifferentiated conception of rural and urban, nation and region, class and wealth, rein-

forces class and caste stereotype and promotes a concept of social order at all cost.

Overall, a monolith of power is constructed which does nothing to interrogate received notions or to create a genuine understanding of the multiple realities which co-exist in any social structure. At the end of the road, such an education system prompts the structuring of individuals who are either failures by its narrow standards and who exist on the fringes of a capitalist employment framework, or successful but unused to interrogating received ideas, or worst of all, cynically convinced of the possibility of adapting all systems to suit their convenience. What is sacrificed in the process is the development of citizens who are eclectic, aware of a multiplicity of realities and suspicious of absolutist notions of a single truth.

II

How exactly does the shaping of perceptions occur through textbooks? One crucial issue is the ways in which what children learn, constructs and orders the concept of the nation and the implications of being Indian. A conceptualisation of this simultaneously amorphous and yet very real identity is most interestingly visible in English readers where precisely because there is no pre-set structure of information or 'facts' to be covered in the syllabus, the choice of material is revealing in its valorisations and silences.

Perhaps the most striking feature of these textbooks is the overtness of their focus on a disturbingly narrow definition of national identity.¹ Nationhood and a specific form of national integration recurs relentlessly as the path to individual and community success. Ostensibly, there is a self-conscious awareness of India's religious and regional diversity – yet as is quickly apparent this does little to promote a tolerance for the different Indians which a student would in fact encounter

¹ All examples are taken from textbooks produced by the NCERT and the SCERTs of UP and Kerala. I have chosen to dwell on state-produced books because they are much more widely used than texts produced by private publishers.

In a Class V reader, for example, all chapters which deal with a group of friends and students – a heterogeneous mass of people – display a pious determination to reflect the national spectrum of communities. We thus meet Anu, Rashid and Manjeet: Hindu, Muslim and Sikh in one chapter. In another, Taheer, Reena, Joginder and Roshni (again, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh) are at the circus together. A slight variant on the idea is found in another chapter in which three friends, Seema from Bengal, Shama from Punjab and Sonia from Madras share a room. Their friendship suggests the happiness achieved by national integration even as they are carefully and stereotypically differentiated:

'Seema is from Bengal. Her hair is long. Her eyes are big and black. Shama is from Punjab. She is very fair. Her hair and eyes are brown. Sonia is from Madras. Her hair is black and curly. Her eyes are black.'

What is significant however, is that differentiation, whether by region or religion, is restricted to its external and most obvious manifestation. There is no awareness of cultural difference other than that which is reflected in skin colour and names. What is never represented are the signs and practices which give meaning and reality to cultural differentiation. Instead there is a grim determination to eschew all specificity. Rashid, Manjeet, Seema, Shama all seem to live identical lives, share identical activities, worship an undifferentiated God to whom they pray, and feel proud of the monochromatic, normative India which is relentlessly reiterated.

The dually specific and generalised nature of this identity is patterned on an ambivalent conception of the nation, a construction in which religious difference and cultural variation is perforce acknowledged but also seen as a threat. Influenced by the discourse of the colonial nation-states of the first half of the century, it simultaneously idealises a monolingual, homogenous cultural identity while reluctantly recognising the existence of diversity. In eschewing dis-

inction, therefore, the textbook is not positing a workable ideal of national one-ness in a post-colonial multicultural society such as India; instead it rejects the eclectic tolerance which is crucial to its structure, misrecognising the fact that pluralist identity can only be built upon empathy and an understanding of difference and not on blindness to the very existence of difference.

This is a problem which exists in the handling of religious identity as well. Once again, texts *overtly* articulate a position of secularism in a multi-faith society. Implicitly however, secular ideology in these textbooks is atheistic, premised upon an equal distance from all forms of religious identity rather than by a recognition of various faiths. Thus individuals like Jameela Begum, Paul Joseph, Abdul Rehman and Maria Paul constitute respectable, productive members of *civil* society such as police officers, judges and doctors. However, beyond these names there is no significant representation of Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, or Muslims of the past or the present. While there is the token lesson on Id, there is no attempt to make students understand different forms of religious practice as a vital category of experience. In its discomfort with mentioning the specificities of different religions, the text inevitably makes strange the religious and cultural practices of various communities – most crucially that of religious minorities.

The policy of a seemingly secular silence on the specific aspects of religious identity is also highly misleading. There is for instance, no dearth of references from Hindu mythology which thus assumes the status of an all-encompassing Indian mythology. Extracts from the Mahabharata abound: stories like 'The Gift of Eklavya' or 'The Passing of Bhishma' – both of which address specifically Hindu themes like the conflict between karma and dharma; students also read the story of the good king Shibi who is tested by Yama and Indra, and about Lava and Kush and Ram's brother Bharat from the Ramayana. Not one story of a Muslim sage, ruler or character is found in any of

the books. In fact, all too often, 'Hindu' is synonymous with 'Indian'.

More insidiously, Hindu identity is often seen as superior. In a playlet entitled 'Long Live Shah Jehan' a character, Mahabat Khan, is introduced as 'a nephew of Rana Pratap *but* had embraced Islam and *gone over to* the Mughals' (emphasis added). The suggestion of betrayal arises from the tacit assumption that to change from Hindu to Muslim is a moral failure. However, the opposite is not true: later in the play Shah Jehan joyfully acknowledges, 'I'm a Muslim, but I'm proud that three-fourths of the blood in my veins is the blood of the Rajput race.' It is important to see that there is nothing overtly communal about either of these quotations; rather, it is a subtler issue which moulds student conceptions of what is desirable or acceptable.

The essentialisation of Indian identity as undifferentiated and homogeneous is reinforced in a variety of ways. The concept of the nation, a definition of its singular essence, is ratified through a juxtaposition with other civilizations. Perhaps in a worthy attempt to shake off its colonial legacy, the lessons never deal with occidental cultures, only with oriental ones. Here there is a blithe assertion of difference which only reiterates the singular specificity of India in contrast to other societies. Implicitly India is posited as the normative culture so that oriental societies become the quaint Other of Indian high civilization. A good example is in a chapter significantly titled *Strange Houses*. Consider the opening lines

'Hundreds of years ago, people lived in caves .. These people were almost like beasts. Now men live in lovely houses made of wood, bricks, stones and such other things. But even now, some people make *strange houses* (emphasis mine) to live in.'

The chapter goes on to list Chinese floating houses, Red Indian tents, igloos, Japanese lightweight houses and Pacific tree houses in which live people who 'are rough and are always fighting with one another.' The assumptions of this chapter are startling. A 'lovely' house is one

which is rectangular and solid; all others are, as suggested by the title, 'strange'.

What is always made strange is the living patterns of the Chinese, the Eskimos and the Japanese. 'A visitor from Japan' informs the student that her compatriot in Tokyo likes

'to eat sweet beans with raw fish. My mother wears a pretty kimono when she comes for tea. When she goes out, she carries a pretty umbrella and wears flowers in her hair.'

Later, in the description of the Festival of Dolls, we are told that:

'My grandmother's and my mother's dolls are kept in the storeroom. But on this day they are brought out. They are dressed up beautifully and they are put on show in our best room.'

The gaze here, is strongly orientalist. For here is a discussion of customary practice as we never saw in the discussion of Indian culture, but it is viewed from the outside. An Indian child might be forgiven for wondering why grown women preserve their dolls and play with them once a year. Or why a mother dresses up for tea *every day*. Here we have a fact presented without the discussion or the description which is vital for any appreciation of the richness of another culture. Instead the student would inevitably view Japanese culture as strangely childish in its propensity to play games and dress up on inappropriate occasions: the classic Orientalist gaze, in fact.

III

The circumscribing of reality is not restricted to a definition of the nation. Take gender, for example. Once again texts are careful about an overt suggestion of gender equality. Thus a class five reader places boys in domestic scenarios and girls outside the home, or suggests that both genders participate in physical activity. Thus 'Ravi is sweeping, Jaya is returning from the zoo'; 'Joginder is walking but Roshni is running', even, with a ludicrous disregard for colloquial usage: 'This is Randhir.. These are his balls. This is Radha. This is her bat.' Beyond these bald statements however,

patriarchal assumptions raise their ugly head, most specifically in the sphere of woman-as-mother: an exercise on sentence structure has the following variants for students to use:

Tell your friend, 'While you were reading your mother was cooking a meal/making tea/ washing clothes/ sleeping in her room/ watering the plants/ praying to God/ doing the kitchen work' etc.

There is no chapter in which ordinary women are a part of the work-force, are thinkers or are anything other than nurturants.

In another lesson we are given an outline of the activities of Mrs. Chandran: 'Mrs. Chandran is getting the dinner ready and waiting for her husband to come home. She will eat only after he comes. Mr. Chandran comes home hungry but dinner is not ready.'

The use of 'but' within that sentence revealingly suggests that he could reasonably have expected dinner to be ready. We are also told that he reads a newspaper, that

'When dinner is ready Mrs. Chandran will have a long bath. Mr. Chandran can have his dinner when she has finished her bath. He switches on the radio and sits listening.'

What are students to make of this domestic scenario? The reader must admire the patience of Mr. Chandran hungrily reading his newspaper as Cleopatra-like, Mrs. Chandran luxuriates in her bath. The text does not suggest that he could have finished cooking while she had a bath. It does not even suggest why dinner is not ready: was Mrs. Chandran too away at work all day or is she merely a bad time manager?

More insidious is the representation of wives who are routinely constructed as nagging and selfish. In the story of Rip Van Winkle, for instance, we are told that 'Mrs. Van Winkle had a sour temper and refused to mend her children's clothes.' This gratuitously included domestic detail is symbolically important. It suggests a woman who is an uncaring failure of a nurturant mother and prompts the

reader's sympathy for Rip when he takes off because 'he wished to escape his short-tempered wife's nagging.' In the process, the story invites the reader's indulgence for Rip's own dreamy escape from life on the grounds that he had little choice.

Similarly In another well known fable, 'The Monkey and the Crocodile', it is the crocodile's wife who is unscrupulous enough to covet the monkey's (her husband's friend's) heart. Her method of persuasion with her husband is the cliched wheedling of a traditionally manipulative woman:

'You have never refused me anything before. Maybe you do not love me much now .. If I don't have that heart to eat, I shall starve myself to death.'

Ultimately, the harried and hen-pecked husband joins a long list of males in stories, who sacrifice friendship for domestic peace. He agrees to trick the monkey into a visit so that his wife can eat his friend. The moral judgement which operates in the story is interesting. It is not the male crocodile, the weak betrayer who is the villain, but his wife. The story reinforces all the traditional myths in a patriarchal society of the dangers of allowing any power to women.

The unproblematic delineation of masculine and feminine identity therefore does nothing to interrogate the hierarchies of gender power as they exist in a student's world. It confirms traditional divisions of labour within the home and outside it, generally viewing agency as belonging naturally to men; when this is altered it is seen as a gross violation of the natural order which can only lead to strife and unhappiness.

The problems with such delineations are far-reaching. In their reiteration of stereotypes of the good mother, the good daughter or the good wife, texts deny women the possibility of shaping their own identities and the space to be anything which does not conform to these. Far from interrogating the conceptions of popular tradition, they reinforce patriarchal assumptions confirming male power and notions of female deviancy and transgression.

IV

It is ironic that one of the most striking aspects of textbooks is the ubiquity of their good intention. Whatever the subject, textbooks with chest-thumping rhetoric set out to manufacture worthy, patriotic citizens of the new India. There is nothing subtle about the process – it has the relentlessness of bad propaganda. The issue is not therefore one of institutional ignorance about the role of education in shaping and developing social attitudes, rather, it is to remember that inculcating tolerance is a tricky kettle of fish which does not easily lend itself to being trumpeted from the rooftops – not without distortion or a fatal over-simplification.

If we consider the different possible definitions of tolerance, the various ways in which students can recognise the existence of multiple identities, this becomes evident. What are the different ways in which tolerance can be conceived of? One way is to acknowledge that different identities do exist within the nation but also to believe that an over-arching national identity is supreme, so that anything else is subservient to this. A second is to accept the existence of different groups and identities but to also stereotype 'them' as fundamentally different to 'us', suggesting that no common meeting ground exists. Third, we can display tolerance of difference, but exercise it as a tolerance which works from a position of paternalistic superiority and condescension. Fourth, we can recognise that no individual or group is definable by a single identity, the fact that we simultaneously belong to a specific religion, gender, class or nation means that multiple identities exist and conflict within us and that each of these often contradictory spheres needs space and recognition.

Which type of tolerance does our education system teach? Which one should it teach, and how?

As is evident from an examination of textbooks, the form of tolerance which is taught falls into the first and third categories. The concept of the nation is seen as supreme and national identity is essentially undifferentiated and unfederated.

This is clearly only a token form of tolerance. A mere mention of difference is inadequate if it is not based upon empathy and understanding. Pious proselytising cannot be a substitute for a detailed knowledge of why people believe or live in certain ways or of what shapes specific beliefs and customs. The existing discomfort with particularism is as dangerous as the aggressive assertion of difference which commonly underlies fundamentalism: specificity is intrinsic to identity and a blandly homogenised society is an unreal construction. The generalised homilies which substitute for detail in textbooks, in fact prompt a contrary response—along with a dismissal of the platitudes contained in textbooks, students uncomplicatedly dismiss the ideas which they carry: the medium becomes the message with a vengeance.

Much of the problem is rooted in a specific and highly problematic notion of knowledge itself. It is time that the basic premise of knowledge in our education system moved away from the absolutist position which is currently worshipped. Students must realise that our visions of the world, our conceptions of self and the other, our notions of our relationship to society may vary; that what is routinely conceived of as natural and normal may be contested.

Of course this is only possible with a radical revision in the functioning of pedagogic authority—textbook or teacher. An authoritarian structure of knowledge which parcels out ideas as incontrovertible facts shapes individuals who are reluctant to concede the existence of more than a single, simple truth. The absence of any space for students to question textual material, deadens them to the possibility of questioning their own ideas or experiences. Inevitably they hesitate to see the real elephant outside the window, preferring the familiar world of textual and pedagogic authority which demands only obedience.

It is however, only through a recognition of the importance of empathy and understanding and a fostering of the ability to question that our system of education can help to counter the intolerance of our time.

The paths of peace

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

ACCORDING to Voltaire, 'Tolerance is a law of nature stamped on the heart of all men.'

Nothing could be truer than this statement, tolerance is, indeed, a permanent law of nature. But it is not something which has to be externally imposed, for the human desire for tolerance is limitless. Just as truth and honesty are virtues, so is tolerance. And just as no one ever needs to ask how long one should remain truthful and honest, so does one think of tolerance as having an eternal value. The way of tolerance should be unquestioningly adopted at all times as possessing superior merit.

A man who is intolerant is not a human being in the full sense of the expression. To become enraged at antagonism is surely a sign of weakness. Of course, there are many who do not want to recognise the principle of tolerance as being eternal for, in conditions of adversity, the temptation to retaliate becomes overpowering. The feelings of anger which accompany negative reaction must somehow be vented, and those who think and act in this way are keen to retain the illusion that, in retaliating, they are not doing anything unlawful.

Such thinking is quite wrong. In reality, when a man is enraged at anything which goes against his will, tolerance as a priority becomes paramount. Many men strive to become supermen. But the true

superman is one who, in really trying situations, can demonstrate his super tolerance. Just any act of antagonism does not give us the licence to be intolerant. Rather, such occasions call for greater tolerance than in normal circumstances. In everyday matters, where there is none of the stress and strain of opposition, no one has difficulty in being tolerant. It is only in extraordinary situations, fraught with conflict that the truly tolerant man will prove his mettle.

On 1 January 1995, the United Nations proclaimed 1995 as the 'Year of Tolerance', stating that the ability to be tolerant of the actions, beliefs and opinions of others is a major factor in promoting world peace. The statement issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (UNESCO) on this occasion, emphasises that amidst the resurgence of ethnic conflicts, discrimination against minorities and xenophobia directed against refugees and asylum-seekers, tolerance is the only way forward.

It pointed out that racism and religious fanaticism in many countries had led to many forms of discrimination and the intimidation of those who held contrary views. Violence against and intimidation of authors, journalists and others who exercise their freedom of expression, were also on the increase along with political movements which seek to make particular groups responsible for social ills such as crime and unemployment. Intolerance is one of the greatest challenges we face on the threshold to the 21st century, said the Unesco statement 'Intolerance is both an ethnic and political problem. It is a rejection of the differences between individuals and between cultures. When intolerance becomes organised or institutionalised, it destroys democratic principles and poses a threat to world peace.' The Hindustan Times (1 January 1995).

This proclamation of the UN is most apt and timely. The prime need of the world today is indeed tolerance.

One of the stark realities of life is that divergence of views do exist

between man and man, and that it impinges at all levels. Whether at the level of a family or a society, a community or a country, differences are bound to exist everywhere. Now the question is how best unity can be forged or harmony brought about in the face of human differences.

Some people hold that removal of all differences is the *sine qua non* for bringing about unity. But this view is untenable for the simple reason that it is not practicable. You may not like the thorns which essentially accompany roses, but it is not possible for you to pluck out all the thorns and destroy them completely. For, if you pluck out one, another will grow in its place. Even if you run a bulldozer over all rose bushes, new plants will grow in their place bearing roses which are ineluctably accompanied by thorns. In the present scheme of things, roses can be had only by tolerating the existence of thorns. Similarly, a peaceful society can be created only by creating and fostering the spirit of tolerance towards diversities. In this world, unity is attainable only by learning to unite *in spite of differences*, rather than insisting on unity without differences. For total eradication of differences is an impossibility. The secret of attaining peace in life is tolerance of disturbance of the peace.

There is nothing wrong in the diversity of opinions. In fact, this is a positive quality which has many advantages. The beauty of the garden of life is actually enhanced if the flower of unity is accompanied by the thorn of diversity.

An advantage flowing from this attitude is that it builds character. If you are well-mannered towards those whose views are similar to yours, you may be said to exhibit a fairly good character. But if you treat those holding divergent views or who are critical of you with respect, then you deserve to be credited with having an excellent character.

In the same way, a society whose members hold identical views and never have any controversial discussions will soon find itself in the doldrums. The intellectual development of the members

of this society will be frozen because personal evolution takes place only wherein interaction of divergent thinking provides the requisite mental stimuli.

The adoption of a policy of tolerance in the midst of controversy and in the face of opposition is not a negative step. It is undoubtedly a positive course of action.

Divergence of views plays an important role in the development of the human psyche. It is only after running the intellectual gauntlet that a developed personality emerges. If, in a human society, this process ceases to operate, the development of character will come to a standstill.

Nobody in this world is perfect. If a man is endowed with some good qualities, he may be lacking in others. This is one of the reasons for differences between people. But, for life as a whole, this disparateness is actually a great blessing. The good points of one man may compensate for the shortcomings of another, just as one set of talents in one man may complement a different set in another. If people could only learn to tolerate others' differences, their very forbearance would become a great enabling factor in collective human development.

After 1947, when the first government of independent India was formed, two important leaders were included in it. One was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the other was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Pandit Nehru's westernized ideas were in great contrast to the orientalism of Sardar Patel and this caused frequent differences of opinion between these two leaders. But this proved to be a boon for the nation because with Pandit Nehru's abilities compensating for the shortcomings of Sardar Patel, and vice versa, the end result was one of an efficacious complementarity. The above is a good example of the difference between the respective natures and opinions of individuals essential for human development in general.

The habit of tolerance prevents a man from wasting his time and talent on unnecessary matters. If we react nega-

tively to the unpalatable behaviour of others we lose our cool, whereas when we remain emotionally untouched by such behaviour, our mind retains its equilibrium, enabling us to carry out our duties without wasting our time over distractions. The policy of tolerance or forbearance enhances our efficacy, while intolerant behaviour reduces it.

Tolerance is not an act of compulsion. It is a positive principle of life, expressing the noble side of a man's character. The existence of tolerant human beings in a society is just like the blooming of flowers in a garden.

So far as Islam is concerned, it is an entirely tolerant religion. Islam desires peace to prevail in the world. The Qur'an calls the way of Islam 'the paths of Peace'. (5:16) The state of peace can never prevail in a society if a tolerant attitude is lacking in the people. Tolerance is the only basis for peace; in a society where tolerance is absent, peace likewise will be non-existent.

Peace is the religion of the universe. Peace should, therefore, be the religion of man too, so that, in the words of Jesus Christ, the will of the Lord may be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

In a similar vein, the Qur'an tells us that: 'The sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each in its own orbit runs.' (36:40)

When God created heaven and the earth, He so ordered things that each part might perform its function peacefully without clashing with any other part. For billions of years, therefore, the entire universe has been fulfilling its function in total harmony with His divine plan. The universe is following this path of peace, which is known in science as the law of nature as it is imposed upon it by God, whereas man has to adopt this path of peace of his own free will. This has been expressed in the Qur'an in these words: 'Are they seeking a religion other than God's, when every soul in heaven and earth has submitted to Him, willingly or by compulsion? To Him they shall all return.' (3:83)

Peace is no external factor to be artificially imposed upon man. Peace is inherent in nature itself. The system of nature set up by God already rests on the basis of peace. If this system is not disrupted, it will continue to stay the course set for it by the Almighty. But the only way to keep humanity on the path of peace is to rid it of corruption. That is why the Qur'an enjoins. And do not corrupt the land after it has been set in order.' (7:8)

In order to preserve the peace established by nature, two important injunctions have been laid down by Islam. One, at the individual level, stresses the exercise of patience and, the other, at the social level, forbids taking the offensive.

A negative reaction on the part of the individual is the most important factor responsible for disrupting peace in daily life. It repeatedly happens that in social life one experiences bitterness on account of others. On such occasions if one reacts negatively the matter will escalate to the point of a head-on collision. That is why Islam repeatedly enjoins us to tread the path of patience. The Qur'an says: 'Surely the patient will be paid their wages in full without measure.' (39:10)

The reason for the reward of patience being so great is that patience is the key factor in maintaining the desired system of God. In the words of the Qur'an, 'the patient man is the helper of God.' (61:14)

The other injunction designed to maintain peace in human society forbids the waging of an offensive war. No one in Islam enjoys the right to wage war against another. There are no grounds on which this could be considered justifiable.

There is only one kind of war permitted in Islam and that is a defensive war. If a nation, by deviating from the principles of nature, wages war against another nation, defence in such circumstances, subject to certain conditions, is temporarily allowed.

To sum up, Islam is a religion of peace. The Arabic root of Islam, 'silm', means peace. The Qur'an says: '... and God calls to the home of peace.' (10:25)

Saffron expectations

KANCHAN GUPTA

THE political developments of the past five years and the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party as a leading contender for power have understandably been the focus of current public discourse. Much has been said, as well as written, about the likely fallout of BJP's growth as a political force, more so about how this will affect communal relations in India. The audacious destruction of the disputed Babri shrine at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 and the subsequent rioting which culminated in the bomb blasts that shook Bombay, followed by the electoral setback suffered by the BJP and its remarkable resurgence in the last round of state assembly elections, have formed the core of this discourse.

The articulate critics of the party, who invariably belong to that minuscule segment of Indian society which in spite of the passing away of the Nehruvian consensus continues to preach a certain brand of secularism that is blind to Hindu political aspirations, have been relentless in their crusade against the BJP. We are told how the BJP has communalised Indian politics, how it has led an assault on the secular state, and how all this has severely eroded the cornerstone of India's 'composite society' – tolerance.

But should we mourn the erosion of this ersatz *tolerance* that is now being touted as a virtue or should we welcome the fact that after almost a millennium Indian society is at last coming to grips

with a reality that we have preferred to ignore? Should we continue to define the concept of tolerance as 'a virtue bordering on graceful acceptance of the different, and even the hostile?' Or should we describe it as 'supercilious condescension'? Is not toleration 'an act which figures in historical situations in which differing or warring elements try to jockey themselves into favoured positions with minimum cost to their dignity or principles'? In a sense, each of these definitions is applicable to our society, but not in isolation.

This would suggest that if Hindus are tolerant towards Muslims, then they are but merely graciously accepting the existence of a community that is not only different to theirs but also hostile to them, while doing so. Hindus are indulging in supercilious condescension towards the Muslims, and, their act of toleration is aimed at protecting their dignity and principles. We could substitute the word 'Hindus' with 'Muslims' and the same would be true, but only up to a point. For, while tolerance, whatever way you may define it, is the fulcrum of Hinduism, it militates against the basic tenets of Islam which (like other Semitic religions (it must, however, be stated that Christianity and Judaism have metamorphosed over the centuries, discarding the creed of intolerance to a great extent) essentially preaches intolerance – 'Muhammad is the messenger of Allah,' says the Quran,

'Those who follow him are firm and unyielding towards unbelievers, yet full of mercy towards one another.'

It is against this backdrop that we should consider the two questions posed to this writer: Does Muslim tolerance mean supporting the BJP? What do the Hindus really want of the Muslims? To my mind, the manner in which these two questions have been structured presupposes one, that the words 'BJP' and 'Hindus' are interchangeable, and, two, the BJP represents the entire Hindu population of the country. Needless to say, both the presuppositions are flawed, not least because no political party in the country can claim to represent even half the electorate, leave alone the population. This is not to deny that there is a subtle message hidden in this distortion that ironically is being used both by the BJP and its detractors to their respective advantage. This, however, need not detain us.

In order to put the issue in the right perspective, two points need to be made at the outset. One, the BJP espouses Hindutva as a political ideology and over the past five years this has become the cutting edge of the party, distinguishing it from the other parties. But it would be incorrect to suggest that this complete association with Hindutva is synonymous to its emergence as a 'Hindu party' or a party that is committed to promoting exclusively the aspirations of the country's Hindus. In other words, Hindutva as an ideology is not to be confused with Hinduism as a living religion.

The BJP's concept of Hindutva is not dissimilar to V.D. Savarkar's definition of the term and it would be instructive to go through his celebrated pamphlet in which he says, 'Hindutva is not a word, but a history. Not only the spiritual or religious history of our people as at times it is mistaken to be by being confounded with the other cognate term Hinduism, but a history in full. Hinduism is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of Hindutva.' From this sense of history stems the commitment to *matribhu* (motherland) and *punjabhu* (holy land) which together

assert that the country's integrity can neither be violated nor profaned.

From this sense of history also stems a commitment to our cultural heritage which is essentially Hindu in character and which defines the concept of both Bharat and *Bharatiyata*. Addressing an RSS meeting in Coimbatore, L. K. Advani articulated this interpretation of Hindutva by asserting, 'We represent the commitment that this is our ancient nation, this is not a nation born in 1947, but a nation which has a hoary past and whose culture is essentially Hindu. This should be reflected in the various policies, programmes, attitudes, positions that we take.' And this commitment is reflected in the BJP's policies and programmes; indeed, it is the very basis the party stands for.

The second point is to do with the essential character of Hinduism as a way of life—it is secular in the sense that Hinduism has never promoted the concept of a theocratic state. Hinduism as a religion has been, and continues to remain, a pluralistic religion and the same applies to Hindu culture and society. In spite of Islam's invasion and the oppression suffered by Hindus (the sword of Islam was merciless with the kafirs), the decline of Mughal rule did not witness the emergence of Hindu theocracy as a backlash. The 'Hindu states' which re-emerged, for instance, under the Marathas and the Rajputs, were by no stretch of the imagination theocratic states. Therefore, Hinduism was and remains a 'tolerant' faith in every sense of the term; its syncretic nature continues to flourish.

Yet, secular critics of the BJP have based their entire campaign on the premise that it is a party that promotes exclusively Hindu concerns and aspirations by espousing Hindutva, and that Hinduism is intolerant towards other religions, specifically Islam. Their scare-mongering has had the desired effect of unsettling the country's Muslims and further widening the communal gulf as this alone can keep the 'secular' campaign alive.

This brings us back to the two questions: Does Muslim tolerance mean

supporting the BJP? What do the Hindus really want of the Muslims? I would try to answer the first question by posing another question: Should Muslims support the BJP as evidence of their 'tolerance' or for the party's policies and programmes? A dispassionate look at the BJP's declared agenda for the Muslims, as enunciated in its manifesto for the last general election, will partially answer this question. The party's agenda revolves around three points—peace and security; full opportunity for progress and development, amendment of Article 30 which permits 'minority' communities to run their own institutions (and which has been abused again and again, the latest instance being the laughable attempt by Ramakrishna Mission to take refuge behind this Article in order to obviate state laws) so that justice is done to all irrespective of religion; and, the establishment of a human rights commission instead of a minorities commission. To this may be added the party's commitment to introducing a common civil code and scrapping of personal laws. All these are guided by the principle of 'justice for all and appeasement of none', a principle that is an article of faith for the BJP.

Muslims have the option of either opting for the BJP's agenda or that of the National Front-Left Front combine on the one hand and the Congress on the other. Between themselves, the National Front and Left Front are committed to not interfering in personal laws; implementing special provisions of the Constitution and protecting life and property during riots. The Congress is pledged to protecting life and property during riots as well as setting up special courts to try communal offences. An attempt is now being made by the National Front as well as the Congress to set aside quotas for Muslims to which they will be entitled by virtue of their religion.

Only the naive will miss the overt appeasement that is sought to be practised by these promises. To support such an agenda would amount to denying the fact that riots affect every section of society and not only Muslims. To opt for it would

mean backing claims that are, to say the least vacuous. To vote for it would amount to a vote for the debilitating system of patronage. Muslim life and property has suffered the most in Congress-ruled states, as well as states ruled by the constituent parties of the National Front and the Left Front. On the other hand, BJP-ruled states have witnessed peace and relative calm. To support such an agenda would mean a vote for the devious policy of dividing society into minority and majority communities, a policy that is of a piece with colonial governance and which militates against the concept of integration and social harmony.

On the other hand, if Muslims were to support the BJP, they would not only be breaking free of the politics of vote-banks but also heralding a new era in modern Indian polity. More importantly, they would be reaffirming their commitment to the nation and the national spirit that is so essential to the survival of the country, the 'matribhu' and the 'punyabhu'. This is not to suggest that there is a need for a demonstrative reaffirmation of Muslim commitment but to assert that such a demonstration of support for the BJP will amount to publicly repudiating the agenda of the Congress and the National Front-Left Front combine which is designed to perpetuate not only the 'minority' identity of the community but also the ills that plague Muslim society. Muslims have only to look at their own plight for evidence of the fallout of such policies: they are not only captive to poverty and illiteracy but are also hostage to a clergy which enforces its writ through regressive rather than progressive values.

Therefore, it is not Muslim 'tolerance' that will decide this support but a conscious decision to break free from the past. By voting BJP, Muslims will not be providing evidence of their 'tolerance' or their capacity for 'toleration', but their preference for what Advani describes as 'an honest and straightforward party which is committed to secularism in a genuine sense'. In other words, the question — Does Muslim tolerance mean supporting the BJP? — is not the issue. The

issue is, will Muslims have the good sense to support the BJP, not for the party's sake but for their own welfare?

As for the second question — What do the Hindus really want of the Muslims? — the answer lies in what Muslims should not do to hurt Hindu sentiments and what they should do to vigorously integrate themselves with Hindu society. Muslim separatism, which was encouraged by both the Muslim League and the British for their own selfish reasons, and the insistence on an identity that is in stark contrast to that of the majority community, has done more harm than good. This is one fact that has sadly been ignored by both Muslims as well as their religious-political leadership. Intolerance, from which flows the urge for a separate identity, may have been a necessity when Islam was struggling to establish itself, but it has no place in today's context. They have to decide whether the *ummah* is above the nation or whether it is the other way round.

I will not go into the issue of the disputed shrines which has been the source of much divisive propaganda by the secularists. Neither will I recount instances of Muslim separatism born from the misplaced conviction that the *ummah* is 'first and above all a community of believers.' What I would like to do is exemplify the intolerance which continues to find preference with the Muslim leadership, whether religious or political.

When the Education Minister of Kerala, who also happens to be a worthy of the Indian Union Muslim League, refuses to light a lamp at an inaugural function because it is a 'Hindu custom', he is not only telling Muslims to follow his example but also denigrating the cultural heritage of the country. In the process, Hindu sentiments are hurt to the point where the 'majority' community begins to view the 'minority' community with a certain loathing. When Muslim traders surreptitiously acquire property around temples in Tamil Nadu and after converting them into mosques insist that temple festivals be held without drums, they alienate the Hindus. When Jamaat-

e-Islami leaders express support for the separatists in Jammu and Kashmir, they repudiate the concept of 'matribhu' and 'punyabhu'. When Muslim politicians like Ebrahim Suleiman Sait force the Anjuman-e-Islam into pulling out of a joint venture with Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan which would have benefited indigent children, they widen the gulf that separates the two communities. When Syed Shahabuddin and others of his persuasion agitate against the singing of Vande Mataram, they violate something which is considered sacred by millions of Hindus. And when the Muslim religious-political leadership insists on the community being allowed to retain its personal laws, it ridicules the Constitution, indeed, it asserts the supremacy of Muslims above constitutional directives.

So what can the Muslims do? To begin with, they must come to terms with the fact that Hindus constitute the overwhelming majority in the country and that they can never again regain the political power they lost with the decline of the Mughal throne. Muslims have every right to share power, just like all other sections of Indian society. But they do not have — shall never have — the exclusive right to power, never mind what the clergy says.

Second, Muslims will have to come to terms with the fact that fanaticism or religious obscurantism, not to mention theocracy, are incompatible to a modern state. A Muslim is entitled to marry a woman by signing the nikah, but he cannot divorce her by merely pronouncing 'talaq' thrice. A Muslim woman is entitled to the same dignity that is ensured by the state to a Hindu woman. Muslims as a community must demonstrate their faith in civil society by accepting a common civil code that will draw upon the best traditions of all personal laws and ensure gender equality.

Third, Muslims must reject the vote-bank politics of the Congress and the National Front-Left Front combine and opt out of the client-patron relationship designed to suit the political purpose of the so-called secularists. They must not look towards social, political and economic

patronage (for instance, job reservations as being suggested by the Congress and the Janata Dal) but find a place for themselves in the larger Indian family as equals. They can do this by opting for modern education and enterprise

Fourth, Muslims must demonstrate that they are as much Indians as Hindus. This can be best done by repudiating the concept of a 'minority community' vis-a-vis a 'majority community'. They can, if they want, become equal citizens and equal participants in the creation of a modern, truly secular India.

Fifth, Muslims must realise that by retaining the veto which was put in their hands by the British they have alienated vast sections of the Hindus. By saying 'no' to all that is suggested for their integration and insisting on maintaining their 'separate identity', they have only fuelled suspicion and apprehension. The 'separate identity' which they want to protect so zealously is widely perceived as a 'separatist identity'. One way of removing Hindu misgivings would be to identify with the nation's cultural heritage and forsake extra-national loyalty of every form

Sixth, Muslims will have to acknowledge the fact that while India is not (and shall never become) a Hindu state, it was and shall remain a Hindu country. Muslims can no longer afford to ignore, as they have been told to do by their religio-political leadership as well as the champions of pseudo-secularism, the predominant religious ethos of India.

And lastly, Muslims must have faith in the 'tolerance' and capacity for 'toleration' of Hindus. They have nothing to lose but everything to gain by reposing this faith in the numerically stronger section of Indian society which is tired of being a silent witness to what Sri Aurobindo described as 'political adjustments and Congress flatteries'

The first step towards this paradigm shift in Muslim attitude would be to vote for the BJP. Can Muslims summon the courage to break with an imperfect past for a better future? In a sense, the answer to this question will also answer the two questions posed above.

Precept and policy

SALÈEM KIDWAI

ONE MAJOR advantage of analyzing the limits of tolerance within the medieval context is that the idea of tolerance is freed from the modern construct of secularism. The essential meaning of tolerance is obscured and distorted when it is subsumed under secularism – be it 'positive secularism', 'negative secularism', 'neutral secularism', or whatever

It is erroneous to assume that tolerance is necessarily a positive attitude. In fact, tolerance can often be the disguise of negative attitudes. Tolerance, according to its dictionary meaning, is about the willingness to live with views or situations which are contrary to a person or society's predominant beliefs. This willingness could be the result of pragmatism, security, confidence or the intellectual/emotional position adopted to adjust to situations that cannot be changed for the moment. Needless to say, intolerance can originate from the same range of circumstances and emotions.

Given the emphasis on the pragmatic roots of tolerance, this essay does not address tolerance within a religion or as a religious value. Instead, I focus on the usefulness of tolerance in the formation and functioning of a state. To do this, I delineate the views of three important voices from within the ruling class over a particular stretch of two centuries in medieval northern India; illustrate that these supposedly intolerant thinkers took remarkably tolerant positions when faced with difficult political realities, trace the progression of this contradiction, and provide a context to understand these changes

Specifically, I intend to reconstruct the idea of what constitutes tolerance by looking at state formation in northern India in the 13th and 14th centuries. These two centuries have been chosen because this was the first time in northern India that a powerful state which professed Islam as its political ideology arose and then withered away. This development was of tremendous significance, in large part because the 'Hindu-Muslim question' has been among the most vexatious issues facing modern India. It is also over this issue that discussions of 'tolerance' are most often focused. Furthermore, both proponents and opponents of secularism today look to medieval times for examples to buttress their arguments.

The original founders of the Sultanate of Delhi were Central Asian tribesmen whose conversion to Islam had been a powerful unifying force, transforming marauding nomadic groups into an army of ambitious Muslim generals. For the Sultans of Delhi, too, Islam was a convenient political ideology. First, it was a powerful tie between the generals and the rank-and-file soldiers. Second, Islamic political thought had already developed the concepts needed to establish militarily powerful, centralized states. These concepts included the all-powerful monarch, a centralized bureaucracy and tested policies to deal with non-Muslims.

Though the political ideology that these men inherited was distant from the Arab and Persian heartland of the Islamic empires, political ideologues consistently

mouthed the same platitudes about the Shariah as their predecessors had done over the centuries. Clearly, the inheritors of this ideology knew that historical developments had not matched the idealism of the platitudes. The preceding six centuries of Islam were replete with political actions that ran counter to the tenets of the Shariah. Usman, one of the 'Pious Caliphs', had been murdered by Muslims, the sanctity of the Ka'ba had been violated, and graves of Muslims desecrated and corpses defiled on numerous occasions by fellow believers. The greatest hero of both Muslim Sultans and theologians, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, had massacred Muslims and threatened to drag the 'Holy' Caliph behind his elephant through the streets of Baghdad. Muslims were obviously remarkably tolerant of Mahmud's behaviour!

So too the Muslim Sultans in India displayed a similar tolerance towards ignoring – where necessary – the strict precepts of the Shariah. Anything less would clearly have been folly. Had the political affairs of the Sultanate been run according to strict Islamic tenets, in whatever form or language they were stated, the empire would not have been established, let alone have survived to become so powerful. The Muslims in India were vastly outnumbered by the non-Muslim population. In India, Muslim rulers ruled over the largest percentage of non-Muslim population known in the political history of Islam. They would not have survived if they had not been pragmatic – or 'tolerant'. This had been a common feature of all successful political experiments in Islamic history. No matter what was professed as the religious ideology, it was matters of this world that, in the final analysis, determined political policies.

In order to demonstrate the persisting tension between ideal precept and actual policy, this essay focuses on three important figures from the medieval period. All three were well-educated men and ensconced at high levels within the ruling elite, both politically and socially, at different periods. These three

are also the most important chroniclers of the establishment and collapse of the Delhi Sultanate. All three profess their unequivocal belief in the Shariah as the dictating principle for the personal and political lives of the Muslims and almost continuously state this belief in their works. Yet as commentators on political developments they are willing to accept and justify digressions that are blatantly outrageous when measured by the strict guidelines of the Shariah.

It is what they were willing to tolerate that concerns us here. It is by looking at these that we can support the hypothesis that tolerance/intolerance is most often the result of practical or political attitudes rather than an intrinsic state of spiritual being. This needs to be stressed because I am deliberately avoiding the non-orthodox view of Islam that was expressed by the Sufis and by Muslims who were not a part of the ruling elite. Including them, and other seminal thinkers like Amir Khusraw, of course, would be a very valuable exercise but it would necessarily extend into areas, sources and ramifications far beyond the dimensions of this article. It would also detract from the force of my basic argument of what constitutes and drives 'tolerance'.

The three historians that I have chosen are Minhaj (b. 1193), author of *Tabaqat i Nasiri*; Barani (b. 1284), the most important of them all and who authored among others, the *Tarikh i Firuz Shahi* and *Fatawa i Jahandari*, and Afif (b. 1356), also the author of a work called *Tarikh i Firuz Shahi*. They have been chosen, in part because of continuity as they cover the history of the Sultanate of Delhi in an uninterrupted way from the time that Qutb ud din Aybak found himself independent upon the death of his master to the death of Firuz Shah Tughlaq, following which Timur's invasion destroyed the central authority of the Sultanate. Both Barani and Afif are conscious of this continuity. Barani claims to have picked up the thread of history from where Minhaj had left it, and Afif claimed to have been completing the history left unfinished by Barani.

All three use vocabulary that is intolerant. It is from them that histories like those published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan draw their examples for their thesis of Hindus being denied their 'civil rights' and the 'right to public worship' and of 'indignities and humili- ties (sic) inflicted upon them as a general policy', of 'acts of terrorism' against 'hap- less Hindus' and of the Hindus being the 'object of contempt', a feeling which 'ani- mated all the Muslim conquerors and is echoed in all Muslim chronicles.' True the chronicles could, if used selectively, sup- port this unhistorical thesis. Yet it is easy to understand why they are frequently used by those who want to believe that the Islamic credo is intolerant per se. These chronicles are as full of evocative phrases like 'contumacious infidels in great numbers being sent to hell.'

It is not just the vocabulary all three use that is one of intolerance. They also categorically state intolerant attitudes every time generalised statements have to be made or positions taken. Yet, con- fronted with actual situations they are surprisingly found to take very tolerant positions.

Minhaj was brought up in the royal household of Ghor. He migrated to India when the depredations of the Mongols made it clear that the only Muslim king- dom east of Egypt that had a chance of survival was beyond the Indus. In the Sultanate he came to hold the highest ecclesiastical and judicial offices. He was involved in various military campaigns and was an effective propagandist through his sermons. He was also one of the lead- ing Ulama of the state, at various points being in charge of the three madrassahs that had been set up.

Having stated their political and theological positions, the Ulama of this period were wise enough not to insist on their patrons following them. If they had, there would have been no Sultanate. Minhaj or any of the Ulama like him had as much at stake in the survival of the empire as any military amir.

For the founders of the Sultanate, religion was as much a matter of politics

as of personal faith and they found many allies among the Ulama. They made an overt show of respect towards the symbols of Islam because it was their religion which was the emotional bond between the Sultans and their supporters. The Ulama adopted a very practical approach to matters. They did not raise embarrass- ing questions for the rulers. Compromises were continually being made in the politi- cal and administrative fields, and the Ulama learnt to do so in the religious field as well.

Minhaj does not find it offensive that Lakshmi or Nandi continued to exist on early Islamic coinage of the Sul- tanate. This perpetuation of an un-Islamic practice was not objectionable as long as the coinage continued to be accepted by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Neither did he seem to care that the Shariah would have disqualified the ascendance of Raziyya to the throne of Delhi. (It was left to a 17th century theologian to wonder how his predecessors had not objected to such a flagrant violation of the conditions of the Imamah.)

When Minhaj took a stand in a political conflict, he would justify his position by using the rhetoric of the 'armies of Islam'; it did not matter if both armies were those of Muslim war- lords! This reaches farcical limits when the rebel forces against the Sultan's ones are credited with the epithet, solely because the Sultan's forces were being led by a convert whom he intensely disliked. Cynically, he labelled this convert one of the 'tribes of Hind', but at the same time praised another convert, Hindu Khan, for his exemplary conduct. Similarly, Hindu chieftains of no threat to the Sultanate were 'noble and illustrious' while the followers of a respected sufi, when they attacked the corruption of the Ulama, were 'sent to hell' and their leader branded a heretic.

Minhaj's work has to be seen as having been conditioned by the times. An *alim*, identifying with the future of the state, and living in politically unsettled and fluid times, he had to come to terms with reality. This reality was that the

purpose of religion was to serve the state. No political theory more than this simpli- fication was needed since the situation was in a flux and institutions had yet to crystallise.

By the time Barani wrote, the institutions had not only crystallised but major tensions and contradictions had begun to appear. He and his history reflect these.

It was Barani's ancestors who had fled the Mongols. Barani himself was born in India. In expressing a political ideology, Barani goes far beyond Minhaj. He was not chronicling the establishment and survival of a new ruling class and was therefore conscious of the compromises that had to be made by the Muslim gov- erning classes in order to survive and had to justify them. Since the decline of the Sultanate coincided with the decline of his own personal fortunes, he naturally sees parallels in the two developments.

Barani had grown up in the environs of a royal capital and had the leisure to learn from or hear discourses of 46 great religious scholars by the time he was twenty. He was also attached to the circle around the powerful Chisti Shaykh Nizam ud Din Awliya, a group which included people like Amir Khusraw. He was also among the people around Muhammad ibn Tughlaq whose reign saw not only the apogee but also the beginnings of decline of the Sultanate. As someone whom this Sultan often conversed with, Barani admits that he did not want to risk losing royal favour by speaking of the deviations from the Shariah that the Sultan was guilty of.

In Barani's writing after Muha- mmad ibn Tughlaq's death, there is a clear willingness to come to terms with and tolerate deviations not aligned to his oft-stated belief in the Shariah. He states the monarchy is unIslamic but also says that governing can only be done in ways totally antithetical to the traditions of the Prophet and further that kingship is next only to the Prophetic office in importance.

To live within this contradiction required tremendous tolerance. Giving

the example of an early Sultan, Barani mentions how the leading Ulama had petitioned that the Kafirs should be given an option between conversion and death. The reaction of the Sultan's wazir was that since Muslims were like salt in a dish this was impossible because the Muslims would not survive the consequences. Barani approved of this sagaciousness. Barani himself stressed that the state had to make laws 'on which knowledge and reason agree' and if these contravened the Shariah, 'alms should be offered by way of atonement.'

Apart from such realistic thinking, Barani espoused views that contravened the Shariah in their bigotry. Among the laws proposed by him was one that would have barred the low-born from being employed by the state. His reasoning here borrowed from the Hindu caste system despite his stated abhorrence of the practices of non-Muslims. According to him, the ideal Islamic society was one where 'mankind (was) graded into various classes. The function of the government was to maintain a just balance between the various classes.' For him low-born Muslims were vile, useless, base, and mean-spirited and he is horrified at the social mobility of some who were not 'high-born'. That this had begun to happen, according to him, was because of the pernicious influence of the 'rationalists and philosophers.' Thus they were anti-Muslim and it was the duty of rulers to execute them. If Mahmud of Ghazni had got hold of Ibn i Sina, the great philosopher and scientist, Barani was sure he would have had him butchered and fed to the kites. All professions should be fixed and education was socially unhealthy because it made people give up their old professions. If conversion was the reason for the rise of new elements in the political hierarchy, that was totally unacceptable to Barani. So was the fact that so many Hindus were richer than Muslims.

Another of Barani's views was that prostitution should be tolerated so that the virtue of good Muslim women would be secure.

But Barani could simultaneously give sound advice. No king, he advises, should destroy the existing ruling class when he founds a new dynasty because it makes reconciliation to his rule more difficult. Jihad too is not compulsory for a ruler unless his own territory is safe.

Approximately half a century after Barani had written his book, Afif finished his of the same title. Much had happened in these decades. The Sultanate and all those who benefited from it had been destroyed by the savage invasion of Timur, another Muslim ruler. Timur, to justify his invasion had claimed that he was punishing the Sultan because of the digression from the ideals of Islam.

When Afif writes his history it is with a sense of nostalgia, the attempt to create a golden age where peace and prosperity prevailed for all and where conflict was absent. Afif's ruler is a Sufi. War was undesirable because it caused misery to Muslim women and wasted money which could be used for charity. (The real reason, Afif's hero was a disaster as a military leader and strategist.) Therefore, in spite of the conventional rhetoric of intolerant Islam his assertion was that 'Tolerance has been regarded as the greatest virtue in all religions but specially in Islam.'

That this categorical assertion is so different from that of the two early historians is only natural. Hindus were no longer the major threat to the ruling class. The ruler that Afif is eulogising spent more time fighting fellow Muslims than he did non-Muslims. Unlike Minhaj, for Afif both Hindus and Muslims had suffered at the hands of the 'Mongols'. The easy tolerance is also reflected in his descriptions of both Hindus and Muslims participating in religious festivals at the court. In fact he also approves of Firuz Shah touching the feet of the Shaykh ul Islam. Afif does not have the self-confidence to ignore or abuse the Hindus. He admits to the prosperity of Hindu kingdoms and finds in the Prophet's saying solace that his followers were created small so that they need less to get by. After all rewards awaited them in the next world!

Misplaced anger, shrunk expectations

D R NAGARAJ

IF THE gods decide to withdraw from this strife-ridden nation called India, it will not bother the classes and castes warring on the issue of reservations in the least. Since material interest is the only driving religious force of both the old and the new middle classes – and is quite fundamentalist at that – the programme of positive discrimination has evoked frenzied reactions. As a result the debate has turned fiercely ideological with little space for self-doubt. In any case, as Rajni Kothari points out, the violent intensification of the controversy surrounding Rama's birthplace is linked to the militant assertion of the social and political identity of the lower castes using the recommendations and the implementation of the Mandal Commission as a rallying point. Radical political thinkers argue that Rama was used to split the newly emerging unity of lower castes in north India. That was how the tumultuous nineties began.

It is sufficiently clear that no new insights or solutions are possible on the question of reservations at this point in time. This is not because the issues have been thoroughly analysed and understood but because no new material, which can put the debate in a totally different perspective, is available. For instance, there is no reliable national data or comprehensive study on the extent of

implementation of the reservation policy at the state and central levels. Against this background both the anger of the opponents and expectations of the supporters on the issue of reservations are, to say the least, based on prejudices and partial truths. It is an almost Sisyphean task to offer a position which is acceptable to both. Nevertheless one should try. No doubt, this is what can be described as pessimism of the mind, optimism of the will.

The policy of affirmative action is not seen as a self-dissolving programme, though it is interesting to note that the late Socialist leader Madhu Limaye used the phrase 'self-liquidating' programme to denote the same thing. Except for militant supporters of an extremist cause, no one is prepared for self-liquidation. It is thus extremely naive to expect communities engaged in a combat with upper castes to do so. But as Justice Chandrachud once observed, reservations even for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) cannot go on indefinitely.¹ If a strict time limit is imposed, say ten years, leaders like Ramakrishna Hegde are prepared to accept a 90% quota, thus outdoing V P Singh, whom the middle

¹ Cited in Haroonbhai Mehta (ed), *Dynamics of Reservation Policy*. Patriot Publishers, New Delhi, 1981, p 181.

classes and the English language press abused for his stand on this issue.²

Viewed in isolation the anger of the opponents of reservation, against what is being perceived as a perennial policy, is justified. But at least in the case of reservations for the SCs and STs, there is a semblance of tolerance, giving room for doubt that these classes are still too vulnerable to be able to challenge the hegemony of the upper castes. An interesting slogan, heard during the agitation against the Mandal Commission report declared 'Agra-harijan bhai-bhai, yeh pichadi jati kahan se aie?' (Upper castes and harijans are brothers, where have these backward castes cropped up from?).³ So the problem is more acute with the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), generally treated as undeserving groups muscling their way in. On the whole, there is a strong position which warns that need too is always, and not just in special cases, an attribute of groups rather than of individuals.⁴

The most important aspect in framing a policy of time-bound reservations and designing it as a self-dissolving project, is to assess the status of the various castes by the same criterion which led their inclusion as reserved categories in the first place. In states like Bihar, Karnataka, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, many of the existing castes in the OBC group have long outgrown that stage of backwardness, except in the area of representation in the central services. The Chinnappa Reddy Commission approached it in a different way and was consequently ignored. The rest is part of Karnataka's history.⁵

The various permanent Backward Class Commissions are not keeping a

tab on the implementation of different policies of affirmative action. They are being used to merely examine the claims of different castes for inclusion in the list of OBCs. In other words, these bodies are being treated as vehicles for furthering the short-term political interests of different ruling regimes. Let alone the state-level Backward Class Commissions, even the permanent one at the centre is not effectively monitoring the implementation of different policies.

For instance, the use of the provisions of exemption from implementing the policy of reservation are unclear. A whole range of other institutions (including Defence), which are immensely powerful and important, have been rigorously practising this exemption since Independence.⁶ This shows that the state and its apparatus just do not believe in the efficiency of the lower castes, which is a crude casteist position indeed. Sometimes this can go to the extent of blaming SC and ST low-level employees for the increasing number of railway accidents!⁷ It only now remains for the lower castes to denounce the upper castes for bungling the nuclear energy project which is exclusively manned by upper castes.

The lack of political will to prune the list of reservation-deserving castes has led to the burgeoning numbers of OBCs. Each new report of a commission brings an additional number of entrants into its ranks. A scholar notes that there were only three OBCs in the Madras Presidency list in 1883: this had risen to more than 320 in 1983. This pheno-

menon is true of almost all the other states as well.⁸

The policy of reservations in post-Independence India was conceived, as D.L. Sheth puts it in a succinct summary of the issues involved in the debate on affirmative action, as part of a larger package, other important components of which related to structural issues like land reforms.⁹ Not surprisingly, today no one talks about the presence or absence of other programmes of the package. It is well known that the policy of reservations is ultimately useless if it is not accompanied by supportive measures. In fact, reservations are only a small, though vital, part of the total project for social transformation.

Also, the expectations of people from reservations have shrunk considerably over the years. The radical nature of this project has been reduced to small gradualist measures. The truth is that some groups, both in pro- and anti-reservations camps, wanted it to be so. For instance, no pro-reservations group, particularly among the OBCs, emphasizes the necessity of paying attention to other elements of the package, if only for the sake of form.

The real relevance of the policy of affirmative action has been seriously curtailed in the new economic regime of privatisation. For private business and industry the question of reservations just does not arise, at least for the present. The role of the state itself is increasingly being marginalised in the area of employment. The SC and ST employees associations of banking industries are already feeling the pinch.¹⁰ In fact, Sitaram Kesri, the union minister of Social Welfare, has talked about the widely prevalent prejudices which will work against the lower

2 Ramakrishna Hegde, personal communication, July 1995.

3 Cited in Indu Bharathi, 'The Politics of Anti-Reservation Str', *Economic and Political Weekly* 25(15), 10 February 1990, p. 310.

4 Andre Beteille, *The Backward Classes in Contemporary India*, OUP, Delhi, 1992, p. 43.

5 Scholarly arguments were also used to refute the recommendations of the Chinnappa Reddy Commission Report. See Thimmaiah, *Power Politics and Social Justice*, Sage, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 129-148.

6. Many writers on the issue of reservations discuss the practice of exemption in the defence sector approvingly and want it to be extended to other areas as well for maintaining efficiency. See A.M. Shah, 'Job Reservations and Efficiency', *Economic and Political Weekly* 26(29), 20 July 1991, pp. 1732-1734. The author uses interesting information from another document compiled by two judges B.D. Purohit and S.D. Purohit, *A Hand Book of Reservations for SCs & STs*, Jainsons, New Delhi, 1990, to show that all scientific and technical posts in the departments of space, atomic energy and electronics have been exempted.

7 Ashok Guha, 'Reservations, Myth and Reality', *Economic and Political Weekly* 25(50), 15 December 1990, p. 2718.

8 P. Radhakrishnan, 'Backward Classes in Tamil Nadu (1872-1988)', *Economic and Political Weekly* 25(10), 10 March 1990, pp. 509-520. This study is an interesting account of the genesis and growth of the reservation policy in the Madras Presidency.

9 D.L. Sheth, 'Reservation Policy Revisited', *Economic and Political Weekly* 22(46), 14 November 1987, pp. 1957-1962.

10 Personal communication from Jakkappanavar, an office bearer of SC and ST Bank Employees Federation, Karnataka unit, April 1995.

castes and minorities, a statement that needs to be quoted in some detail.¹¹

Given the attitude about reservation in the business world, you (i.e. the business groups) may not at this stage think of adopting reservation as a policy of recruitment in the private sector. But a fair and just system of recruitment is indeed called for. For example, I know of business organisations whose policy it is not to employ Muslim minorities, even if they qualify for the job. (The same applies to the Dalits, the tribals and the OBCs)

In the coming decades, there will be a battle over the other niches in public spheres and not necessarily over jobs and material structures. That war is already over and has been won by the upper castes. The next round, mostly symbolic, will be fought on the notions of cultural power and hegemony, a mechanism which has guided Indian history over the last few centuries. The symbolic act of upper caste boys taking to shoe polishing and street cleaning during their protest against the Mandal Commission is, in fact, a reflection of this. It conceals the fact that the same middle class boys will be only too willing to do menial jobs in the West. The ritual barriers that held them back, as for instance the one we find in the *dharma shastras*, have been removed to enable them to slide downwards in the times of *Apatkala*. But the same mobility for lower castes is symbolically denied.

The real problem is the presence of the dominant castes, a useful category developed by M N Srinivas, among the OBCs; they have defined and conditioned the parameters of the policy of reservations on behalf of the OBCs. But here too, the issue has to be defined carefully as even the dominant castes like the Vokkaligas, Koiris, Kurmis, for various historical reasons, have been denied proper representation in the central services. The crucial question is: can't they compete in general categories? A sincere answer to this question needs to be found

The only workable solution is to prepare a discriminating list of OBCs, a task few are willing to undertake

Related to this is the problem of the inherent biases of the programme for affirmative action, which have moulded the policy of reservations in India. Historically, two streams have gone into the making of the present reservation policy: first, the hypocritical stream which has its origin in the colonial Madras Presidency, which had also devised a mechanism to turn a blind eye towards the annihilation of indigenous economies. The second stream originates from Princely Mysore, which was the expression of the *Satshudra* aspirations.

In the case of the latter, the politically articulate classes were locked in a battle with the upper castes; their insults were generalised, their ambitions were projected onto others.¹² Ritualistic disability was treated as the single most important problem of social transformation. Thus the politics of reservations were wrongly defined from the very beginning as a study of the aspirations of the castes hungry for administrative and social power.

In short, this is essentially a double problem, a legacy of *Satshudras* who decided to become rebels, and those who refused to accept the rules of the Hindu social order any longer. The next step should be to develop a new category of describing castes, which can encapsulate both the social basis that is suggested in the category of 'dominant castes' and also include the processes that are indicated in the category of 'sanskritisation'. I would like to use the category of *pratinayakas*, who fought the hegemony of the Brahmins, to denote the importance they command in the history of caste struggles in the present century

The philosophy and practice of reservation was inspired by the South but its wisdom and generosity were overlooked by the rest of the country

12 For a detailed discussion of the relationship between religion and reservation, see D R Nagaraj, *Cultural Choices and the Construction of Political Theory* (forthcoming) p. 25

As M C Raja, leader of the Depressed Classes in the Madras Presidency in the pre-independence years, puts it: the backward classes were only marked by backwardness in education and not in other areas like social, economic and political power. This crucial distinction has been forgotten today.

To put it differently, the state and the proponents of reservation had no problem whatsoever with the larger and more sweeping changes that Indian society was experiencing. The landed gentry and powerful castes wanted to be represented in government offices and authority. New forms of authority that were shaping colonial rule or indirect rule were clearly beyond their reach; they had to assert their claims on governance. The process of resettlement did not alter their economic clout in any significant way, but administrative power lay beyond them.

As a result, these victims of modernisation lost out in the race for social mobility and material well-being. India as a civilization suffered badly in the onward march of colonialism and modernisation. Indigenous industry, technologies and lower caste, non-peasant economies were slowly annihilated in the ruthless march of history. They deserve an equal space in reservation with SCs and STs, but they are clubbed along with the dominant castes

From the very beginning, the debate on reservation became an impassioned or guilt-ridden critique of Hinduism. Paradoxically, it favoured those who remained within that framework. Those outside it were not so fortunate. For example, the policy of extending reservations to the depressed groups among the Sikhs was put into practice only when suitable constitutional measures were adopted. Similarly, the inclusion of the Dalit population among the Christians and Buddhists became a contentious issue.¹³

This also explains the resistance shown by the Hindu right to the idea of extending reservation to include the

11 Sitaram Kesri, speech at FICCI on 3 July 1995

Muslims. Going by the meagre data available, Muslims suffered equally under the colonial-modernising epoch of Indian history. A sizable number among them continue to cling to their traditional professions, like weaving, oil-pressing, bangle-making, shoemaking and metal work – activities which are almost invisible in the context of modern economies.¹⁴ Caste ranking continues to haunt the Muslim community as well, though they refuse to make political capital out of this sorry state of affairs. This is partly because to do so would mean an acceptance of defeat for Islam in a larger sense.

It can be safely said that the unconscious assumptions of the basic cultural battle launched in the South has shaped the framework of the Backward Class Commissions. Though occupation is taken into account as an important factor in determining the level of backwardness of a group, the weightage it commands is very uneven. Even now ritual status continues to be the major consideration. Hence the kind of attention occupation deserves, has not been given, except in some cases.

Against this background, the limits of tolerance mean an upper limit of 50% to reservations. Even this will not repair the damage that is done to tribals. It is a mockery to reserve seats for them in educational institutions and jobs. The expectations of the beneficiaries have also shrunk and they have forgotten larger entitlement claims. As far as the anger of the elite is concerned, part of it arises out of an ignorance of historical processes. But a large part of it is the sheer cunning of upper castes who have adroitly practised it for the last several centuries.

Meanwhile, three classes which need reservations and other programmes of the egalitarian transformation package the most – the tribals, the really humiliated and the poor castes, and the victims of technological change – continue to suffer silently. India, both as a society and a civilization, just does not have the ideas or the energy to break out of this tragic impasse.

14. For a discussion of the impact of modernization on Indian Muslims, see Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), *Modernization and Social Change Among Muslims in India*, Manohar, Delhi, 1983.

Resolving conflicts

MADHU KISHWAR

EVER since the UN declared 1995 as the Year of Tolerance, many a seminar and conference has been held on the subject with our political leaders, bureaucrats and various celebrities extolling the virtues of tolerance. A similar resurgence of conferences on the theme took place following the Babri Masjid demolition. Left secularists suddenly discovered the Sufi-Bhakti tradition in their attempt to combat the culture of intolerance and inter-community violence in our society. As a result, audiences were subjected to grand music festivals of medieval bhajans, *dohas* and Sufi songs in several cities of India in attempts to wean them away from the hate-mongering communal propaganda of the Sangh Parivar.

Conflict among human beings and groups is inevitable. There is no evidence that people become tolerant if you subject them to pious speeches, or even offer them deeply moving Sufi-Bhakti songs. People like Kabir, Tukaram and Nanak

had such a powerful effect on their contemporaries not because they composed good verse or gave good sermons, but primarily because their life was their message. People were moved by their love, compassion and deeds, all of which challenged the prevalent prejudices and sought to bridge the divide between the rich and the poor, the high caste and the low, Hindu and Muslim. It is their actions and deeds which sanctified their poetry and their verbal message.

Today, when their *dohas* or *shabads* are recited by power-hungry politicians whose own lives run completely contrary to the original message, people are naturally left untouched. Similarly, when an avowedly Stalinist party like the CPM resolves to 'use' the Bhakti and Sufi traditions to combat the growing influence of the BJP in the Indian polity and gets involved in organising festivals of Bhakti-Sufi music, its impact cannot go beyond providing high quality entertainment for a day or two to a select audience.

Attempts to use Kabir's message without attempting to live one's life in tune with it would inevitably ring hollow. The politics of the CPM would have to embody not strife but love and compassion in order for people to take its words seriously. However, even powerful voices like that of Kabir could not urge people to become mutually tolerant merely on the strength of their own inspiring lives. People have to see the advantages of tolerance over intolerance.

Tolerance flourishes in societies and polities that are able to provide effective, workable means for conflict resolution in a way that every individual and group can count on a measure of protection for their specific interests. For this to happen, it is crucial to have effective mechanisms for mediation, as well as skills at evolving a measure of consensus on conflicting claims and rights of different groups. In times when such institutions no longer function effectively and begin to collapse, people become increasingly intolerant of the claims of others and resort to aggression and violence in order to deal with conflict.

Unlike Europe, India has no comparable history of inter-religious or denominational conflicts spread over centuries such as those between Jews and Christians, with the latter intermittently attempting to virtually wipe out the former; or denominational wars which went on for centuries and only subsided recently (but consider the Balkans) such as those between and among various sects of Catholics and Protestants. In fact, ethnic cleansing has been a frequent response of western societies whenever they are confronted with ethnic groups different from mainstream society.

Modern western nations were built in some parts of Europe only after those countries did their best to get rid of groups professing different religious dogmas or belonging to different ethnic stock. Western Europe cleansed itself of almost all Jews through centuries of violence and persecution. When European settlers went to the New World they did a fairly thorough cleansing of that area, given the technologies available at that time for wiping out the native inhabitants. In India we have no comparable history of any group being targeted for ethnic cleansing or of centuries-long hostility among ethnic groups being acted out in day-to-day living.

For instance, there is no history of Hindu-Muslim riots or pogroms in pre-British India. The various communities living here were able to evolve fairly sophisticated norms for co-existence while simultaneously preserving their distinct cultures. This was in part due to the fact that in India we generally lacked a centralised authority structure both in the religious and in the political realm. For example, in India there is no counterpart to the Roman Catholic Church with its ambitious attempts to determine inter-personal and inter-community behaviour at the local level. Nor did political rulers in India sitting in distant capitals try to govern the personal lives of people. Villages were self-governing on most issues, abiding by their internally evolved social norms for working out conflicts among its various *jatis* and *biradaris*.

Thus, no matter who ruled at the top – Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Maratha – the conflicts among various rulers did not necessarily disturb people at the village level. Consequently, various groups and communities had the space to work out norms of living together without much interference from outside and from above. This is the reason for the unique feature of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs joining together in each others' religious festivals at the local level and even, at times, having common places of worship. As long as the responsibility for ensuring law and order, dispute settlement, organising security and taking care of common needs such as sanitation, water and education rested at the local level, *jati* and village panchayats functioned effectively, even though they did not and were not meant to ensure egalitarianism.

With the imposition of the British version of a modern state machinery, the traditional systems of conflict resolution and taking care of common civic needs began to crumble. This form of the modern state appropriated all power, taking away from local decision-making whatever it desired, leaving the rest of the structure of community-living to rot. While it destroyed the old, it failed to evolve a functioning system of conflict resolution to distribute social wealth and rights over natural resources, and to manage religious and civic affairs. This colonial legacy is a major reason why we see a dramatic rise in social conflicts in our times and consequently, a growing intolerance.

This intolerance is best illustrated by the story of an ongoing conflict in Delhi between a group of slum dwellers and a neighbouring upper middle class colony. The manner in which this particular conflict has been allowed to fester because the two sides are trying to use the dysfunctional machinery of the government to press their respective claims, has only escalated it further and sharpened hostility between the two groups. The degeneration of this small conflict into a mini civil war has many common features with some of the larger conflicts in our society.

such as that between Kashmir and the central government over the devolution of power, between Punjab and Haryana over Chandigarh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over water sharing, between Hindus and Muslims over Babri Masjid, between the government of Gujarat which wants the Narmada dam completed and those who oppose it. In fact, many of these conflicts have been actively instigated by various politicians as a tool in their electoral political struggles.

Shahid Sukhdev Nagar is a jhuggi-jhonpri (JJ) cluster in Delhi adjoining D Block of Ashok Vihar in north-west Delhi. This area also has wealthy middle class people living in bungalows, some of which are owned by Wazirpur industrialists. The 5000-odd families of Sukhdev Nagar live in shanties constructed illegally on railway land by the side of the railway line that separates Ashok Vihar from the industrial area of Wazirpur, which faces it

At least on paper, the government has altered its policy in recent years from forcible resettlement of JJ clusters to improving and upgrading existing squatter settlements. They have now provided some minimal amenities with the consent of the agency whose land has been encroached upon. However, since the Ministry of Railways, which owns the Sukhdev Nagar basti land, opposes any permanent construction, the basti has even fewer amenities than many of the regular JJ colonies. This means that the residents have to go to Ashok Vihar for many of their basic needs. All schools, shops and dispensaries are either in Ashok Vihar or further away in Azadpur.

The slum-wing of the Delhi administration has a provision for installing one water tap for every 100 jhuggis and one toilet seat for every 25 jhuggis. However, in Shahid Sukhdev Nagar the city administration has not provided for any toilets whatsoever. Given the overcrowding in the basti and the minuscule size of these jhuggis, there is no way the dwellers can build toilets. The nearest latrine complex, with 60 toilet seats, is nearly a mile away in Wazirpur. This is run by an NGO

(Sulabh International), along with two other latrine complexes for the entire Wazirpur industrial belt. The users have to pay 50p per visit to the toilet. Its distance and the cost makes this latrine complex unviable for the jhuggi dwellers. A family of six, for instance, would have to spend Rs 90 monthly for one visit per day per person to the pay-toilet.

This is clearly prohibitive considering the family incomes of the people. Moreover, given the prevalence of diseases like diarrhoea in such settlements, visits to the toilet are likely to be more frequent. Distance adds to the impracticality of the pay-toilet system, especially for little children.

In the absence of toilet facilities, the residents began to ease themselves on the slope by the other side of the railway line and in the nearby park facing D block of Ashok Vihar. These areas soon became vast open latrines. In addition, the park became a thoroughfare for easy access into Ashok Vihar for basti residents needing to go to the ration shop or dispensary, for their children to go to school, or for women to go to work as domestic maids in the nearby middle class houses of the colony.

This 'misuse' and 'abuse' of the park became a major source of conflict between the Ashok Vihar residents and Sukhdev Nagar basti dwellers. Apart from the terrible stink that enveloped their neighbourhood, the local residents were also concerned about the likelihood of various diseases spreading from the filth and fecal matter the jhuggi dwellers left behind as litter every day.

They prevailed upon the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to build a wall blocking the access of jhuggi dwellers, who would break the wall in no time and continue as before. In 1990, the residents welfare association of Ashok Vihar filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court demanding its help to protect their park from becoming an open toilet and offered to construct a boundary wall around the park. The DDA, as one of the respondents, claimed that it was unable to protect that park from daily encroachments as the basti residents

thwarted all its attempts to maintain the park. The High Court not only upheld the plea of the Ashok Vihar residents, it went so far as to direct the SHO of the local police station to render all possible assistance to the DDA and its contractors.

The police were assigned the responsibility of ensuring that the DDA not face any obstruction in raising a six-foot wall to prevent unauthorised entry into the park. In addition, the police were ordered to ensure that 'unauthorised persons' did not use 'the said part of the park as a public lavatory'. The court also ordered that some lavatories be constructed for the use of the JJ dwellers. This part of the order was not put into action but the other directives of the court regarding the misuse of the park were indeed implemented. The local *thana* began to provide round the clock police vigilance at the newly-constructed boundary wall.

The basti dwellers did not know they were expected to honour court orders indefinitely. Sections of the wall were pulled down in January. Each time the wall was broken, it was repaired by the DDA. Towards the end of 1993 a constant police presence ensured that the basti dwellers were effectively barred from the park, now well-maintained by the combined efforts of the DDA and the Ashok Vihar residents. However, the residents resented the fact that the basti dwellers still used the park as a thoroughfare.

On 30 January 1995, this conflict erupted tragically. Eighteen-year old Dilip had come from Allahabad to see the Republic Day parade in Delhi and stayed with his relatives in a Sukhdev Nagar jhuggi. The residents claim he ventured into the park because he did not realise it was 'illegal' to defecate there. The policemen on duty kicked and beat him up so brutally that he collapsed and died on the spot. This caused a great stir in the basti. Thousands of people gathered and prevented the police from taking away Dilip's body for post mortem. They insisted that a political leader or senior official come to the spot. The police retreated initially but returned around 9.30 a.m. with heavy reinforcements. The

jhuggi dwellers began to pelt stones at them, some of which hit the houses of Ashok Vihar residents, as the police had positioned themselves on that side of the divide.

Instead of using tear gas or rubber bullets to disperse the crowd, the police opened fire killing three more people and injuring dozens more. One of the injured is reported to have died later. Not satisfied with this, the police barged into the basti, broke open doors and beat even those who were peacefully sitting in their homes. Among the injured was a woman who was hit by a bullet in her home. In addition, the police arrested 123 basti dwellers, who were later released on bail.

When I visited the area fifteen days after the event, I saw little boys and even children, victims of police brutality, with broken bones wrapped in plaster. The jhuggi dwellers were both angry and frightened. Ashok Vihar, guarded by police guns, had literally become a battlefield.

What pained me most was the reaction of the local residents. They aggressively justified the brutal police action, convinced that if the police had not opened fire their homes would have been attacked and looted by the jhuggi dwellers.

Even though the Ashok Vihar residents depend for their domestic and industrial labour on the basti dwellers, they wanted the jhuggis removed or their occupants denied access to the colony. Even the death of young Dilip and the serious injuries suffered by many jhuggi dwellers had not moved them. Almost all the women residents of Ashok Vihar that I talked to denied that the police were responsible for the killing. They claimed that the boy had died of a 'heart attack', having come to Delhi for treatment. This rumour was of course not true. The residents welcomed the policemen with supplies of food and tea and demanded greater protection for their area, especially for the wall.

For days after the firing, their domestic servants did not come to these

hungalows to work. The Ashok Vihar housewives attributed this temporary absence to a vindictive boycott by the jhuggi dwellers, whereas the jhuggi dwellers explained that they were afraid to enter, with nearly a hundred armed policemen camping in the park. Several politicians also visited the area and made appropriately populist speeches, depending on which of the two groups they were addressing, leaving the place seething with rage and mutual distrust. Police guns were now the only means of communication.

Could such a situation have arisen in a traditional village? By 'traditional' I mean a village which is sufficiently remote, either in time or geographical location so as not to have experienced our 'modern' police and courts and the rest of the paraphernalia of modern day governance. This is not to say that traditional villages did not have their own share of inequities, social tyranny, and conflicts over the use of natural resources, including the possession of land. But in a traditional setting, such a matter would have been resolved through accommodation. In all likelihood they would have first held their respective biradari panchayats, then perhaps a joint meeting of the two biradari panchayats and eventually come to some kind of a mutually acceptable solution. It may not have been an equitable one but the emphasis would have been on workability. The High Court order took no notice of practicality, or whether its order could be implemented, but merely banned people from defecating in one place without saying where else they could perform this very essential function.

It is not that people in traditional societies were necessarily more tolerant or generous. They had to act with a measure of accommodation with each other because they knew the consequences for all of them in calling upon tyrannical forces from outside to settle their disputes. No villager, for instance, could get or would want the badshah sitting in Delhi durbar in those days to send his army to prevent a fellow villager from

grazing his cattle on the village common or from drawing water from a particular well.

If force had to be used to prevent an individual from exercising a particular right or obstructing a group from doing what others did not approve of, it had to be organised locally. People were afraid of resorting to violence for fear of retaliation. Only those who commanded huge personal armies had special clout in society. Caste and biradari cohesiveness provided another buffer. Therefore, there were checks on local tyranny. Group rights were better accommodated, even if the group was unequal in social or economic standing.

However, with the interference of modern state machinery under the aegis of colonial, and later, our home-bred rulers, most of these restraining influences have collapsed. Today, a local landlord or an upper class or caste group can be far more tyrannical because they can call upon the might of the state to intervene on their behalf without risking anything themselves.

Easy access to police, the courts and the rest of the government machinery ensures that the Ashok Vihar residents can depend on their support. They do not need to take into consideration the basic needs of the neighbouring jhuggi dwellers when seeking to provide alternate arrangements, or even fear retaliation.

Similarly, the jhuggi dwellers on their part enjoy the patronage of local dadas and politicians. Jhuggis flourished on public land in return for votes. The basti dwellers thought nothing of creating a nuisance for their wealthy neighbours by polluting the neighborhood. Both groups could act with impunity against the interests of the other, depending on who had greater confidence in gaining the support of the government machinery. Near election time, the jhuggi dwellers would probably have the upper hand. At all other times, the upper class residents could trample on the rights of their poor and relatively disorganised neighbours.

Our government machinery breeds more intolerance because it lacks the

ability to mediate effectively in resolving conflicts. Our law courts encourage litigation for harassment of the opponent rather than resolve disputes. There is no system of consensual arrangements, unless the litigants arrange a mutual out-of-court settlement. Thus the system pitches the two sides against each other as permanent adversaries. Similarly, the police encourage conflicts provided they are not put in any danger: bribes are all they are interested in. Politicians constantly play one section against the other depending on whose votes they are hoping to grab.

Intolerance is rising in our society because we have few means of effective conflict resolution. Consequently, most protests turn into ugly confrontations (the doctors' strike at the All India Medical Institute, the anti-Mandal agitation). In fact, most present-day conflicts are actively instigated by our rulers to make us increasingly vulnerable and, therefore, more dependent on them. Today most of our ethnic and inter-group conflicts are a product of the failure of our government machinery to work out consensual solutions; not because of any deep-seated, innate hostility between communities.

Decision-makers are too removed from the scene of conflict either to have a sensitive and thorough knowledge of the ground realities or any stake in ensuring that problems between different groups are amicably resolved. For instance, judges go by the formal legalistic version of 'hearing the lawyers', often deciding cases from a legal rather than human point of view.

In the case of the Ashok Vihar conflict, the court bolstered the intolerance of affluent residents against their poorer neighbours, the jhuggi dwellers, creating permanent hostility between them. It strengthened the residents' belief that the poor are an unwanted nuisance in the city rather than fellow citizens whose welfare ought to be a matter of concern for all. This despite the benefit of cheap labour the jhuggi dwellers provide in the area. In this respect the urban elite in modern India are more callous and intolerant of the claims

of the poor than the traditional elite in a village setting. The latter, unlike their modern counterparts, recognised their interdependence and knew they could not wish away the poor.

The hallmark of the state machinery we have inherited from our colonial rulers (and failed to overhaul thereafter) is its lack of accountability to the people at large. Earlier, the upper castes enjoyed a monopoly over the use and abuse of power. The logic of universal adult suffrage and caste-based reservations now makes it possible for even lower castes and the disadvantaged to manipulate state machinery to suit their ends.

This should be obvious to all those familiar with the functioning of the state administration in U.P. under the Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party regimes. Reversing the control of the upper castes over the state machinery has only meant that the shoe is now on the other foot, not an end to the misuse of power.

Therefore, today it is in the larger interest to ensure that the police and courts function lawfully and learn to balance the rights of divergent groups or individuals in a non-partisan, yet socially sensitive manner.

People tend to become more aggressive and intolerant when they feel insecure about their physical survival and property. This, very often, is why criminal acts of the police are defended and legitimised by those in whose favour the police has acted (for example, Hindus in communal riots tend to condone and defend open pogroms by the police against Muslims). It is time we realised that involving outsiders – such as the police, politicians and law courts, who have very little interest in the security of the people – in local conflicts works to the detriment of every community in the long run, no matter how economically and socially powerful that community may be.

Our politicians and police have a vested interest in making people feel insecure. If we want a tolerant society, we must encourage local mediation and arbitration in resolving conflict

In praise of intolerance

SRI MADHAVA ASHISH

THERE are at least three forms of intolerance we should be concerned about. Firstly, there is the intolerance we find in the average citizen, an intolerance that seems to stem from the egotism of the immature man who has yet to learn that the world seldom conforms to his expectations. This is the intolerance which manifests in the petty tyrant, as we find him in the home, in the office, in the administration, and in Parliament. These are the secret autocrats who would like to pass laws and make rules which would turn us into obedient automata. They are the last to understand that we, the people, are individuals and intelligent ones at that. We insist on our being tolerated.

Then there is the sort of intolerance which is bothering everyone nowadays, namely, the growing intolerance of one community for another. The population increase with its associated exacerbation of competition for ever scarcer jobs and other scarce resources can obviously be blamed, but we have to look further to the politicians who, by sins of commission and omission, allowed the increase to happen because they saw personal advantages in it. And now it seems that the situation is sought to be exploited by the tiny percentage of the highly influential upper castes who, fearing to be swamped by the aggressive uprush of 'liberated' lower castes and tribals who would like to have their turn at wielding power and gaining their own place in the sun. They

are trading on an intolerance for other communities which they have assiduously cultivated over the centuries. The present gambit appears to be to unite the largely uncommitted masses under their leadership by raising the bogey of the alien within our country.

More attention to better education, especially for the huge rural population, together with unrestricted dissemination of information so that misinformation about such things as the non-Hindu birth rate could be countered, would reduce this threat to a few sleazy figures gesticulating on the sidelines.

This brings one directly to the third type of intolerance which I believe to be the most important of the lot at the present juncture. It is still so rare in India that our politicians need have no fear of it – yet it is an intolerance of evil which is also called righteous indignation. It is rare in India because the old feudal society, with its lack of social mobility and its fixed social roles, did not encourage the free criticism of the powerful by the weak. And when foreign rulers occupied the positions of power, criticism was even less agreeable. It was wiser to practise tolerance.

The point of all this in the present context is whether we, the mass of non-government citizens whose over-tolerant votes have kept a majority of criminals in power for far too long, should continue to tolerate the abuses of power, the corruption, the misuse of public funds (squeezed

out of us by multiple taxation paid by the poorest of us, namely, excise charged upon excise and sales tax charged upon the lot). Is it too un-Indian for us to be angry at the way we have been fooled and exploited by a mafia-like gang of mutual back-scratchers? Are we still so deeply conditioned by our past that we are incapable of taking action against anyone in the hallowed position of ruler?

And in these days of burgeoning greed we must be clear that our intolerance of abuse is not coloured by jealousy of the spending power and the family fortunes enjoyed by the mafia network. Is our intolerance based on anything more sound than our exclusion from a share in the thieves' booty and a wish to enjoy all the goodies they enjoy? Does our resentment spring only from that, or do we genuinely feel that something far more important than greed for personal gain is involved? Do we, in fact, feel that there are eternally valid standards of human behaviour which should be controlling both us and the people who are occupying the seats of power?

Putting aside the ego's fear of annihilation, does it matter whether India survives its degenerative disease or succumbs to it? What is there to lose? An ancient culture rotten with age. A social tradition that no-one believes in: a system that was so hide-bound, so lacking in the social mobility that encourages innovation, invention and aspiration, that all the excitement of living was repressed and people cultivated tolerance because there was nothing to be gained from complaints. Indeed, one is entitled to wonder whether the horrors of the partition riots and of the 1984 massacres were in fact eruptions of all the desires and frustrations repressed by the cultivation of tolerance. In a social order that permits no growth, buried desires grow bitter and burst out violently.

Is that all? What of the new India now being formed by the younger generations who rebelled against convention and broke out into the larger world? What an amazing brightening of the Indian mind has taken place. Is that not worth preserving?

In terms of human evolution, the old order had to pass in order to allow the growth of the new. Much could be preserved, but how little could grow in the shadow of such teachings as: 'Better one's own dharma even though lacking merit than the dharma of another well performed.' What has been preserved – such concepts as that of the unity of all being – is of enormous importance both to India and to the world at large. There is a perception of a transcendental non-physical reality which seems to be lacking from the understanding of most western spiritual schools yet is a commonplace to even the illiterate Indian peasant.

On the other hand, no Indian ever wrote 'Eternity is in love with the productions of time.' No Indian school ever taught that the *jivatma* evolves in the same way that any other human faculty evolves from potentiality to actuality, for there has been overmuch emphasis on the illusory nature of phenomena. Yet these affirmations of the beauty and meaningfulness of existence are crucial concepts for a people who are moving out of the static sterility of fixed and unalterable social roles, and into the social mobility which goes with the opportunities of education and a world of changing laws and changing customs.

When trying to steer our way through the uncertainties of our times, how can we tolerate the people who say and practise 'It is not in the interests of the politician either to educate the people or to raise their economic status.' Compare this with 'The right to Know can become a legally enforceable right only when individuals are educated enough to know what to know and from whom' (The Right to Know, S.P. Sathe, fifth Campus Law Centre Endowment Lectures, 1991)

Therefore I write in praise of an intolerance which is directed against the corrupt usurpation of power, against the use of lies to keep the peoples of India ignorant of the abuses of power, and against the misuse of power to protect offenders from the legal consequences of their offences.

Two cheers for tolerance

RAMCHANDRA GANDHI

TOLERANCE has much to do with giving the benefit of the doubt to others. I'm reminded of a story here: the philosopher K. J. Shah, who died recently, told me this story. He was a pupil of the great Wittgenstein in Cambridge during the 1940s, a favourite pupil. Apparently Shah and Wittgenstein used to go for long walks together, observing a rule laid down by Wittgenstein: that there was to be no conversation. Clearly, Wittgenstein was not very tolerant of conversation, especially with his favourite pupils. He was eccentric in this respect, but he taught Shah an important lesson in tolerance during one of these walks on the edge of silence. Breaking the rule of silence, Wittgenstein asked Shah if he was a Muslim. Shah said, 'No.' Wittgenstein said, 'Are you a Hindu?' Shah said, 'No, I'm a Jain: neither Hindu nor Muslim.' Wittgenstein knew something about Jainism from the Indian philosopher Surendranath Dasgupta, who had lived in Cambridge many years before. Wittgenstein said to Shah, 'Isn't it true that Jains believe that the enlightened ones after their death all gather together on a rock and meditate?' Now young Shah in those years was a typical, intolerant freethinker, intolerant of metaphysical beliefs. So he looked profoundly embarrassed and said, 'I don't believe in these foolish things now.' Wittgenstein was furious, and he said

to Shah, 'You think you are very clever, Shah, you think you know more than these ancestors of yours who have thought about these things for thousands of years?'

This remark of Wittgenstein's completely changed Shah's life and he dedicated himself to the study of tradition. He became tolerant of metaphysical, spiritual thinking. I'm not saying that metaphysical and spiritual thinking cannot be doubted, but there is surely implicit in Wittgenstein's remark an important argument to the effect that one should be tolerant of such thought because of its antiquity, an argument which protects such thinking from quick, cynical, modern dismissal.

Let us turn to something less esoteric. Take children, who are the opposite end to antiquity. Now children can be very noisy and difficult, full of pranks, and yet we tolerate children. In the famous cartoon strip, Mr Wilson tolerates Dennis the Menace every single day. What does his arduous *tapasya* teach us? At least this: that we must give the most difficult children the benefit of the doubts they raise regarding their potential for growing up and becoming less difficult and dependent. There will always be the unregenerate child-hater, mind you, like the humorist W.C. Fields. He was once asked, 'How do you like children, Mr Fields?' 'Boiled,' was his

short reply. Human beings are mercifully more like Mr. Wilson than W.C. Fields when it comes to children. Children make us boil with rage, sometimes, but we don't boil them. I am thinking of real children and not juvenile delinquents, marauders in motor cars these days who often drive old people like myself off the road, on to pavements and worse. I am not suggesting that these monsters should be boiled. I don't think so.

I used to think that tolerance was a dull virtue. I am changing my mind. It may not be as high-minded as love or compassion and it may not be as worldly-wise as coexistence or conflict, but somewhere in between, tolerance has a nice human scale to it, an attractive attainability. So I say two cheers for tolerance. It is not even all that easily achieved, I think. Consider some examples

The tenant in the room above mine is a young man who plays loud modern music through the night. I often wonder if he's going to switch it off around 2 or 2.30 a.m. so that I can sleep, but I can't give him the benefit of doubt. I have to go up, knock on his door, and say, 'Do you mind not playing your music? It's late and I've had a hard day and I'm an old man and I'm ready to sleep now.' And he listens, for a few days. My doubts persist.

My next-door neighbours are a traditional Indian family who fight through the night, quarrel, shout and hate. The men violently abuse the women and I think they also beat them. On one occasion, I heard the threat of burning. I couldn't give the men any benefit of any doubt then. I had to shout and threaten to call the police. I could not be sure that they would stop, that the fighting would cease and the women would be safe.

Now I want to generalise from these two examples. The man who is in the room above mine represents and symbolises all the noise and fighting, unrestrained industrialism and westernisation that is happening all over the world and in our country too. This is a disaster. I cannot give this process any benefit of doubt, I cannot think that it will stop in five years or ten years, that it will run out of

enthusiasm, outgrow its ideology, its fanaticism. I cannot. I must not try to be tolerant of it. The value of tolerance is not available in this context, because it is not rational to think that this process will suddenly end itself. We must give the benefit of the uncertainty here to environmentalists, to all who oppose unrestrained development and imitative westernisation.

Now let us turn to my nextdoor, violent and traditional family. Organised around the idea of male supremacy, it brutally puts down women and children, and in the end harms everybody, both men and women. I cannot imagine that this pervasive set-up, which cuts across class, caste and religious boundaries, will simply reverse itself. It hasn't for thousands of years and it won't, on its own, for thousands of years. Intervention is called for, not tolerance.

These were examples of the conditions of tolerance not obtaining, of situations being intolerable. Let us look at situations where the conditions of tolerance do obtain, but we do not recognise them and become intolerant. In the field of religion, for instance. Take Islam and Hinduism, these great actors on the field of religion, a field of both battle and of creativity. Now anyone who looks at the presence together of Hindus and Muslims in this subcontinent should be struck by the sheer scale of this togetherness. By the fact that Hinduism has endured and not lost all its members to Islam, by the fact that Islam has endured and expanded, and not been assimilated, and in that way overwhelmed, by Hinduism.

This is a most miraculous happening, and I think it should encourage Hindus and Muslims to give each other the benefit of theological doubt, doubt regarding whether the 'other' religion is acceptable to God or not. Quite clearly, Allah is not displeased with Hinduism. Quite clearly, Ishvara is not displeased with Islam. This simple knowledge about one another is the discovery that tolerance is not error or weakness. Because of the way theology and history are understood and taught, however, Hindus and Mus-

lims are encouraged to mistrust one another, provoked to doubt their intentions regarding one another. And yet at the ground level, as human beings, Hindus and Muslims know that the fact of their historical coexistence is proof – the scale and quality and fruitfulness of this coexistence are proof – that their traditions are worthy of mutual tolerance.

Aurangzeb, in the 18th century, did not tolerate some of the saints of his time like Dara Shikoh, Sarmad, Guru Tegh Bahadur, with disastrous consequences. Now these saints tolerated many things. Dara Shikoh gave the benefit of doubt to Hinduism, he did not think that Hinduism was going to undermine or overwhelm Islam. He was a mystic, he understood the mystical heart of Hinduism. Guru Tegh Bahadur likewise did not think that Hinduism or Islam were going to overwhelm his own very specific tradition of Sikh bhakti, which sought and received nourishment from both Hinduism and Islam.

And in our own time, the Hindu Mahasabha and other forces of Hindu orthodoxy did not give the benefit of doubt to Gandhi. They thought that Gandhi's tolerance of Islam was going to weaken Hinduism and they killed him. The one man who could have helped Hinduism to grow into the modern world with a voice of its own, a voice of scepticism regarding aspects of modernity as well as tradition, was done away with. Likewise, with regard to the question of the future of Islam in an undivided India, Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League too easily assumed that Islam was going to be overwhelmed by Hinduism. This was irrational. Islam had not been overwhelmed in the preceding several centuries, how was it likely to be overwhelmed in the centuries that were to follow in the modern world where opportunities for mutual understanding were likely to be much greater?

So here are examples of tolerance withheld even when conditions for tolerance obtained and obtained dramatically, vividly for all to see.

In 1898, Swami Vivekananda visited Kashmir. He was on a pilgrimage of which he has left a pointed record,¹ especially of his visit to the temple of the Divine Mother at Kshira-Bhavani. Vivekananda offered worship to Bhavani in the rigorous manner prescribed by tradition. But remember that he had a passionate heart. In his heart there was anger against Islamic invaders who had come again and again and destroyed sacred Hindu temples and images. Vivekananda addressed the following words of complaint to the Divine Mother herself: 'Why did you permit this, Devi? Why did you permit the invader to destroy your own temples and images?' And then, as he reports, he heard a voice, the Devi's voice, bearing an answer to his rage, to his complaint. The voice said, 'What is it to you, Vivekananda, if I have permitted the invader to do all this? Do you protect me, or do I protect you?'

I regard this revelation to Vivekananda as a sacred text of tolerance for our times, and not only for Hindus and Muslims. Let us look at the circumstances of this revelation. Vivekananda in Kashmir hears a disembodied voice, rather like the prophets of Judaism, rather like Jesus, rather like Mohammed himself; but this disembodied voice is mediated by an image of the Devi. So there is here a revelation which derives its authority from faith in the formlessness of God as well as from faith in divine forms. And this double authority manifests through a feminine voice which addresses not only Vivekananda, although he is its chosen target, but everyone, and I believe Hindus and Muslims of this subcontinent especially, who are so wonderfully represented in Kashmir and who are now so tragically embattled there.

I think the voice that says 'Do you protect me or do I protect you?' says this to Hindus and Muslims: 'Hinduism and Islam are protected, don't worry. I have protected you against yourselves, against your own excesses. I have brought these

two traditions together so that you might correct one another's excesses and so that you might inhabit a portion of this earth together and learn from one another. You were separated by space and time. I have brought you together. You should give each other the benefit of your love and not only your doubts. Love one another. Learn from one another and grow together.'

This seems to me the clear meaning of the Devi's words, addressed to India's and Swami Vivekananda's passionate heart, and conveying a truth of seeing which radically undermines historical hatred. The invader did wrong in destroying sacred images and temples. But orthodoxy had kept thousands and thousands of Harijan Hindus away from these temples, excluded them from worship, enslaved them. Both did wrong. The scales of justice are evenly held by the Devi.

Our conscience needed awakening, it needed the shock of the invader's iconoclasm. Here is cause for humility on all sides, also cause for putting an end to the process of historical revenge and the hatred which this process continues to generate in our subcontinent. Whether in Kashmir or elsewhere, Hindus and Muslims who have understood the spiritual meaning of their coexistence brought about by Allah and Ishvara, or the meaning of tolerance – will surely realise the folly of coveting territory and of insisting on sovereignty, when what is needed is a joint effort by all concerned to deepen their experience of togetherness in gratitude to divinity and time and in the service of an indivisible earth.

Some people find tolerance not enough, they think it is an insult. You tolerate me, thank you very much, you ought to do more than that. You ought to love me, honour me. Of course, but let us begin with something easier than love and compassion, honour and respect – those things will follow, I think, if the practice of tolerance is begun, especially when conditions make this possible. If we fail to be even tolerant when it is possible to be tolerant, we will make it impossible for future generations to love and honour one another: or to forgive us.

¹ See *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, volume VII, Advaita Ashram.

Books

AN EXPLORATION OF THE RAMAKRISHNA VIVEKANANDA TRADITION by Sumit Sarkar. Occasional Paper 1. Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1993.

GURU NANAK AND PATRIARCHY by J S. Grewal. Occasional Paper 2. IAS, Shimla, 1993.

APPROPRIATION OF A FOLK-HEROINE: Radha in Medieval Bengali Vaishnavite Culture by Sumanta Banerjee. Occasional Paper 3. IAS, Shimla, 1993.

RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE: The Case of Chaitanya's Vaisnavas of Bengal by Joseph T. O'Connell. Occasional Paper 4. IAS, Shimla, 1993.

CASTE AND SECT IN VILLAGE LIFE : Satnamis of Chhattisgarh 1900-1950 by Saurabh Dube. Occasional Paper 5. IAS, Shimla, 1993.

MISSIONARY STYLES AND THE PROBLEM OF DIALOGUE by Susan Visvanathan. Occasional Paper 6. IAS, Shimla, 1993.

THE SIX monographs under review are products of an ongoing project (Socio-Religious Movements and Cultural Networks in Indian Civilization) of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. The scope of the project, as the

title itself suggests, is indeed vast, not only in terms of its historical range but also in terms of the areas it tries to cover. At a time when many feel dissatisfied with being sandwiched between mindless 'fundamentalism' and aggressive 'secularism', projects of this kind raise the promise of a fresh beginning. The significance of this project can be seen in two respects. First, the attempt to bring scholars from various social science disciplines to reflect on 'religion' and 'culture' is a step in the right direction. Second, this collective endeavour is not merely about the contested terrain of our past but, in an important sense, also about our 'embattled' present. The project's main thrust, it seems to me, is not to operate within a high degree of generalities but to explore religion and culture from specific historical vantage points. This is why I have reviewed each monograph separately.

Sumit Sarkar, *An Exploration of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Tradition*. Sumit Sarkar's monograph is an attempt to interpret and reconstruct one of the most significant religious traditions of nineteenth-century Bengal. By the end of the last century, Ramakrishna, the Dakshineswar priest, had become a cult figure among the educated middle class of Calcutta, an appeal that remains undiminished till today. Many years ago, a Bengali friend told me: 'If an *amla habu* (clerk in office) of Calcutta is not talking about Uttam Kumar (matinee idol of the Bengali cinema of the '60s and '70s), then he is surely talking about Ramakrishna.' In fact, the intimate and problematic link between this class and Ramakrishna remains central to Sarkar's narrative.

Kathamrita, the major text around which Sarkar's analysis revolves, provides the precise entry point required to tell the story of 'appropriation' and the mutual attraction of 'otherness' between Ramakrishna and his bhadrakalok followers.

Sarkar begins his analysis by posing a paradoxical question: why was the Calcutta bhadrakalok, with its faith on printed books, 'rationality' and 'science', attracted to a person who treated formal knowledge with utter contempt, considered social work futile and preached bhakti in a rustic idiom? In one sense perhaps the attraction of the people (including the bhadrakalok) towards a saint in the neighbourhood does not need any special explanation in the Hindu tradition. Indeed, down the ages, these unlettered men of God, through bhakti, had won the allegiance of many people. What needs to be explained in this context, however, is the nuanced and multi-layered relationship between Ramakrishna and his special band of devotees. In other words, what has to be explained is not the structure of Ramakrishna's ideas and teachings in isolation but its contextual relationship with the life-world of the bhadrakalok.

As Sarkar points out, the life-world of the bhadrakalok in Bengal since the latter part of the nineteenth century, underwent dramatic changes. Earning a livelihood through *chakri* in colonial administration came at a price, humiliation at workplaces, imposition of an 'alienated time' and a sense of relative economic deprivation were conditions the clerks wanted to escape. Ramakrishna, as clearly evident in Kathamrita, responded to these concerns and his parables and stories invoked a world of 'faith' where one could escape without uprooting oneself completely from the concrete world of daily existence.

A critique of *chakri* as embodied in Ramakrishna's teachings was not entirely an isolated phenomenon in Bengal. In fact, much of this found popular expression in the growing 'kaliyuga literature' of nineteenth century Bengal. Traditionally, Kaliyuga was considered a period of rapid reversals and utter chaos. But within the cyclical conception of time, it had to be endured because it prefigured apocalypse both as an end and a new beginning. However, what Ramakrishna's conversation highlighted was a nuanced understanding of the new evils conceptualised in terms of *kamuni-kanchan-chakri*. Unlike kaliyuga literature, Ramakrishna's main response to these problems was along the paths of devotional and not apocalyptic bhakti. The relationship between the saviour and the devotees was perceived in two ways, between the paternalistic *baramanush* and the devoted servant on the one hand and between a loving mother and a five-year old child on the other.

Sarkar's tract brings out clearly the stresses and silences in Ramakrishna's discourse on women, on societal orderings and on the multiplicity of paths of realisation. Ramakrishna's ideas on all these themes, as the author points out, display ambivalences which were, in turn, subjected to conflicting interpretations. For instance, during the Kathamrita years, Ramakrishna had a sizable number of

women followers. For lonely widows and miserable young housewives, a visit to Dakshineswar was a meaningful experience, an escape from the lives full of regret and boredom. For the prostitutes, such a visit was a mode of visibility and recognition. This opening of space for women, however, existed side by side with sexist assumptions and practices. Similarly bhakti, which in its outward orientation, raised the possibility of interrogating a hierarchical social order was subsequently made to preside over and contained within the inner worlds of the devotees. Ramakrishna's catholicity was also not free from tensions. As Sarkar points out, it was mediated by *adhikar-bheda* – a principle which made the differences (both in terms of doctrines and practices) subsist side by side with a hierarchical order.

Ramakrishna, with all these ambivalences and fluidity, was naturally the right candidate for several contestatory appropriations which were to follow after his death. The most well known and arguably the most hegemonic interpretation of the tradition came from his ardent disciple – Vivekananda. Sarkar's main argument, in this context, centres around Vivekananda's initial departure and eventual return to his Guru. Underlying this journey was a deep tension between philanthropy and quietistic bhakti, between the responsibilities towards the external world and the duties towards the domain within. In a sense, the journey from Dakshineswar temple to Belur Math carried with it enormous significance for the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition.

Canonising the tradition was an important feature of this new mode of appropriation initiated by Vivekananda. In this context, the ideas of Ramakrishna that we encounter in Kathamrita took on new meanings. For instance, the tantric background of the Guru was suppressed so that his ideas could fit in well with vedantic *prama*, the threat of *kamuni-kanchan* was reinterpreted so that it could be used for an internal critique of Hindu society and for the ideology of social activism. However, all these ruptures and reversals, as Sarkar argues, were riddled with contradictions and, therefore, bound to remain incomplete. This feeling of incompleteness (both in terms of ideas and agency) which Vivekananda was deeply aware of could only be resolved by returning to the Guru, to the inward-turning bhakti.

Sarkar's monograph will be of great interest to scholars exploring the social and religious world of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Bengal and to all those working on similar themes covering other parts of the country.

However, as one puts down this neatly and comprehensively argued monograph, one feels a little lost. Is this the lower middle class ambience which throws enough light on Ramakrishna's life and ideas? It is a pity that nearly thirty years of Ramakrishna's spiritual quest have to be understood and evaluated primarily through Kathamrita – a text covering only the last four years of his life. This is not to raise doubt about the importance of the Kathamrita but to draw attention to its excessive impact on the frame-

work of analysis. For instance, if we do not consider Kathamrita as a privileged text then what role will the 'stresses' and 'silences' in it play in the overall understanding of Ramakrishna? With all the differences that exist between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, can we put both of them in one tradition?

Most historians are generally wary of handling religious and spiritual experience. But when they do, the explanations are generally couched in sociological terms. In their analysis, 'faith' is ultimately grasped by a conjunctural analysis of historical factors by ignoring its 'ontology'. Unfortunately, Sarkar's narrative does not adequately engage with the question of faith. Can the spiritual experience of the middle class and Ramakrishna's ideas on bhakti be completely grasped within a narrowly framed existential problematic? It is true that for some lower middle class bhadrakal Ramakrishna's teachings provided an escape from their troubled lives. But what about the people whose faith in Ramakrishna was based on a genuine search for spirituality? We shall be interested in their stories as well

J S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy* This short monograph presents a close reading of Nanak's Adi Granth from the point of view of its relationship with patriarchy and its implications for the gender relationship. Grewal makes two fundamental claims. First, that Guru Nanak's symbolic attack on discrimination against women created a larger space for them, although this new terrain remained largely within an overarching patriarchal framework. Secondly, that although Guru Nanak's ideas on 'rights' and 'equality' of women do not match up to contemporary conceptions of egalitarianism, his critique is nevertheless important for its contextual radical thrust. As Grewal categorically declares, although his ideas may not serve as effective slogans for women's liberation they certainly cannot be pressed into the service of defending any inequality of women.

Most historians view 'bhakti' as a mode of dissent which expresses its antagonism against 'brahmanical' Hinduism, caste-based hierarchical social order, religious orthodoxy and the system of patriarchy. Released from the hierarchy and from the clutches of the intermediaries, *bhaktas* can have a direct access to God. Are these *bhaktas* to stand before God as ungendered individuals, stripped off their physical and psychological embodiments? Guru Nanak, as Grewal argues, recognises gender differences but these do not give rise to the unequal demands and duties that God asks of the *bhaktas*. The path of liberation is logically open to all irrespective of their sex.

Attachment to and immersion in *maya*, as Guru Nanak says, is the major obstacle in the path of salvation. Women are both parts and victims of *maya*. So are men. If a woman can be a *manmukh* or a *gurmukh*, so can a man. Here he does not posit any difference between a man and woman. The trajectory of salvation for Guru Nanak, as the author

suggests, remains the same for men and women. However, there are certain special virtues that women have to inculcate to become *sohagans*. The life of a *dohagan* is miserable, full of suffering and dejection. It is only through the name and complete surrender to the spouse that women can achieve bliss and escape from, what Guru Nanak says, the 'coming and going'. There are instances where Grewal thinks that Guru Nanak's ideas display a sexist bias against women. However, according to the author, they do not in any significant sense affect the overall structure of Guru Nanak's teachings. This is what he thinks distinguishes Guru Nanak from other *sants* such as Kabir and Surdas whose teachings bear strong imprints of patriarchal values.

The relationship between bhakti as a subjective or personalised experience and a collective structure of feeling has always been deeply problematic and tension-ridden. Even though the triadic conception of 'femaleness' (such as *stribhav*, *stribhava* and 'higher femaleness' of bhakti) does not feature in Guru Nanak's thought, this does not imply that there is no tension among the experiences emerging out of and lodged in the contradictory locations of bhakti. For instance, there are tensions between seeing God as the divine spouse or *kant* and seeing the husband as God, which cannot be resolved even on a metaphorical plane. The objective of becoming *sohagan* or becoming desirable to the beloved spouse carries with it a burden as well as a promise which cannot be adequately glimpsed from Guru Nanak's text alone.

This is where one feels that Grewal's analysis would have been more interesting if Guru Nanak's text could have been placed in the larger context of that time. I realize that we cannot have a meaningful dialogue with a text written centuries ago by imposing our vocabulary anachronistically. But to treat it as an enclosed cosmos is no solution either. It would have been more engaging if Guru Nanak's text and context (both to be treated not as something given but to be interpreted) could have been brought into a deep play, revealing the contradictory ways they signify. This, of course, should not prevent us from appreciating the lucidity of Grewal's presentation and the importance of the questions he has raised.

Sumanta Banerjee, *Appropriation of a Folk-Heroine: Radha in Medieval Bengali Vaishnavite Culture* Radha, cowherd, tormented beloved, submissive slave and omnipotent source of power – the repertoire of images concerning Radha in the medieval vaishnavite culture of Bengal is indeed startling. However, far from cohering into a monolith, all these images stand in a relationship of 'conflictual' dialogue. The interpretation of this dialogue by mapping the complex sensibilities surrounding the Radha-Krishna love story within a specific cultural terrain remains a major concern of Banerjee's monograph.

Between the fifteenth and seventeenth century, as Banerjee argues, there was an authorial proliferation of the

Radha-Krishna love story in Bengal. It is in the writings of Vidyapati, Chandidas and of several Goswamis of the Gaudiya Vaishnavite sect that Radha appears as a modern heroine deeply enmeshed in the complex narrative of erotic and divine love. Obviously, the authorial imaginations did not take place in a vacuum and this is where Banerjee argues that the folklore, the *sahajiya* tantric cults, and several elements in popular traditions have contributed a great deal to the 'modern' constructions of Radha in the medieval Vaishnavite culture in Bengal. For instance, the pastoral songs and dances around Krishna and gopis, the *Krishna-dhamali*, *Jager gan*, and *jhumur*, (folk-songs around Radha-Krishna romance) seem to have shaped the writings of the medieval poets in Bengal: these folk elements also contributed to what can be called the 'ethnicisation' of Radha. By establishing a different and complex genealogy, Banerjee's work challenges the Goswamis' construction of the Radha-Krishna love story which traces its origin to the Sanskrit *Bhagavat* by ignoring the local folk traditions and popular culture.

The theme of transgression is central to the Radha-Krishna romance as depicted by medieval Bengali poets. The love between the two is not that of two unmarried people because the Bengali Radha is married and, therefore, subject to a patriarchal family life. The adulterous relationship between Radha and Krishna, depicted in the verse of Vidyapati and Chandidas, has to remain outside the framework of a settled marital life, has to oscillate uneasily between a lover's freedom and societal control. To continue her erotic relationship with Krishna, Radha has to be secretive, cheat her family members, and take help from sympathetic friends. If Vidyapati's Radha is astute and capable of creating an autonomous space for herself, Chandidas' Radha is a tragic character, a victim of her own transgression. Radha's desire for Krishna, in Vidyapati's poetry, is ultimately divested of its eroticism by treating her passion as divine. The quivering (therefore, unmanageable) body of the beloved is ultimately transformed into a temple – a site of controlled rituals. Chandidas, unlike Vidyapati, does not ultimately de-eroticise her. Radha, like his beloved Ram, remains imprisoned in her eternal abode of longing. In other words, her passion thrives without its object and her transgression without its physical embodiments.

With the arrival of Chaitanya, as Banerjee argues, the position of Radha underwent another interesting change. The astute Radha of Vidyapati, or Chandidas' defiant and tragic Radha seemed to transform. The theme of transgression, so prominent in earlier poetry, gets gradually suppressed in the institutionalised version of Vaishnavism. Although this process seemed to have started with Chaitanya, it reached its logical conclusion in the ideas of the Goswamis. Radha, according to the Goswamis, is no more a concrete being, she is merely or perhaps only a mode of 'being', a mode of opening up to God. She is indeed the way in which every devotee should relate to Krishna. From

Krishna's lover she is transformed into his submissive devotee, into a *dasa* (slave). This new image of Radha went along with the complete emphasis on *dasya bhava*, on a theological interpretation of *parakiya vad*, and the break between the institutionalised and popular Vaishnavism in medieval Bengal, the author argues, becomes complete.

The significance of Banerjee's work lies both in its deconstruction of institutionalised Vaishnavism and in the reconstruction of a crucial aspect of medieval Bengali folk culture. What appears significant to me is not Banerjee's conclusion about the breakdown of dialogue between the learned and the folk culture but the incompleteness of the project of appropriation – for which the image of Radha still holds our attention.

Joseph T. O'Connell, *Religious Movements and Social Structure. The Case of Chaitanya's Vaisnavas of Bengal*. How did Chaitanya's Vaisnava bhakti movement affect the Hindu social structures in sixteenth century Bengal? Did it successfully challenge the brahmanical Hinduism of Bengal? What were the limits of its intervention? These are some of the questions which the present monograph tries to answer.

Unlike the responses of the uncritical champions of bhakti, O'Connell's answers are somber, unequivocal and are tempered with a series of useful qualifications. According to the author, bhakti should be seen neither as a radical critique of Hindu society nor as a fully hegemonised phenomenon. It can best be understood as a partial and subtle intervention in Hindu social structure of a given historical period.

One of the subtle interventions brought about by Chaitanya's bhakti movement lies in the manner it tries to reconstruct the relationship between the sacred and the profane. If bhakti and the cultivation of the *madhurya bhava* (feeling of sweetness, delicacy, gentleness) belonged to the world of the sacred, the areas of life and the various domains of endeavours outside it belonged to the world of the profane. The primacy and distinctiveness of the sacred zone meant that the Vaisnavas tolerated or perhaps participated in the inequalities of social institutions and relationships which did not directly interfere with the objectives of bhakti. Such a normative re-ordering of the society, or what the author calls a 'Hindu form of secularity', can also explain the Vaisnavas' two-tiered stance towards social relationships: egalitarian attitudes towards the fellow devotees in devotional situations; inequalities in functionality in profane situations.

For the Vaisnava devotees, the separation of sacred from profane was not merely a negative way of coping with the hierarchical social structures, it was also a positive mode of assertion, which contributed to the solidarity among them. The desecration of social practices such as *Varnasrama dharma* and brahmanical ritual system was a part of this endeavour. The creation of *jati-vaisnavas* can be seen not only as a challenge to the varnasrama system, but also as a

creative attempt to construct new forms of moral community. Although, *jati-vaisnavas*, in time, were pulled and mediated by the status-concerns of the jati-system, the impact of their experiment should not be slighted. Besides this, the author also draws our attention to the ways the Chaitanya Vaisnavas brought about new religious leaders, patrons and occupational groups in Bengal. Institutionalised bhakti also became a means of upward mobility among the members of the lower jatis.

By conceptualising the endeavours of the Bengali Vaisnavas as 'passive delegitimation', O'Connell's monograph belongs to an expanding genre on bhakti and one which highlights its limited radicalism. However, what distinguishes this essay is the way it tries to explain the process of intervention in a specific society. There are many interesting suggestions in the work which the students of bhakti will find worth pursuing. The restructured relationship between sacred and profane in bhakti – arguably the central and problematic insight of this work – will, I hope, generate a considerable debate among scholars.

Does bhakti espouse a clear separation between the sacred and profane? Is it not that bhakti tries to break this binary mould by making the boundary between the two worlds as ever shifting and infinitely porous? In bhakti, I think, one can see sacredness or devotion spilling over into the mundane sphere and profanity all the time trying to invade the sacred space. This may not be the case with the institutionalised Chaitanya Vaisnavism but it is certainly true of the popular version of Vaisnavism in Bengal. Finally, I think, in the interpenetration of these two worlds one can locate Vaisnava bhakti's incomplete challenge to and reluctant participation in the inequalitarian social structure in Bengal.

Saurabh Dube, *Caste and Sect in Village Life: Satnamis of Chhattisgarh 1900-1950*. In the early part of the nineteenth century, Ghasidas – a farmhand – created a new sect named Satnampanth in Chhattisgarh by drawing the Chamars and lower castes into its fold. This monograph tells the story of this sect by interpreting its constitutive relationship with the larger village society in the first half of the present century. The Satnamis did not believe in the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon and the worship of idols was replaced by devotion to and faith in a formless god. Nor did they believe in any caste distinctions within their Panth and challenged the ritual and cultural dominance of the upper castes. How do we understand these challenges? How does one map the dissenting imagination of the Satnamis?

Dube begins his narrative by placing the Satnamis in the larger agrarian economy of the region. Most of them were small tenants and nearly a sixth of their total population were agricultural labourers. Even the expansion in trade such as in husked rice and paddy in the present century did very little to alter the subordinated class position of the Satnamis. Recurrent indebtedness and inability to withstand the fluctua-

tions of the economy forced them to migrate temporarily to cities such as Calcutta and Nagpur in search of a living.

The Satnamis saw their marginal position in the economy in relational terms. The fact that the *malguzars* were mostly from the upper castes meant that the Satnamis saw a deeper connection between the economic and ritual exploitation. In the reflections on *goanthia zamana* by Satnamis, one could see clearly the connection between the two. For the Satnamis, *goanthia zamana* thrived on the complicity between the *malguzars* and the colonial state, a complicity which could reproduce a repressive social order in villages in Chhattisgarh.

The practice of *begar* was and perhaps still is a visible symbol of this repressive social order. In purely economic terms it was a practice of extracting unpaid and surplus labour from the poor tenants. However, *begar* cannot be seen merely as an economic practice for it was also a mode by which *malguzars* exercised control over the cultivators. The oral testimonies of the Satnamis presented by Dube bring out clearly the link between the practice of *begari* and the caste factor.

It is against this background of exploitation, indignity and humiliation that the Satnamis' construction of an alternative community, a different normative order should be understood. The projection of a self-sufficient community and of the purity of their faith was part of the newly created self-image of the Satnamis. It is here that Dube's monograph raises some pertinent questions regarding gender and the construction of the Satnami community. Through the analysis of the rituals such as *churi*, rite of initiation and *phanjeri chauka*, the author shows deep-seated tension between the women's agency and the Satnampanth's desire to control women within the bounded community.

The present work raises, although indirectly, a few significant theoretical points regarding the understanding of caste and sect in South Asian societies. First, it challenges the Dumontian way of seeing caste and sect as binary categories within an overarching principle of purity and pollution. Second, Dube puts power as a central category in conceiving the tensional relationship between caste and sect. What is crucial for the author is the manner in which the Satnamis negotiated and challenged the relations of power. However, such challenges did not always follow a clear-cut pattern, indeed the symbolic world the Satnamis created for themselves was circumscribed by hierarchical values of a different order. The nuanced understanding of the power relations in a caste society makes Dube's monograph interesting.

Susan Visvanathan, *Missionary Styles and the Problem of Dialogue*. The subject of religious conversion and the experience of convert communities and groups in colonial India is gradually receiving attention from scholars. A significant body of literature dealing with this theme focus on the problematic link between colonialism and Christianity.

and on the tension-ridden relationship between Christian missionaries and the 'natives'. However, conversion – whether viewed as an individual choice or a collective act, as a change of heart or a response to social egalitarianism – is primarily seen as a linear process which ends with a clean break, with an irreversible defeat of the faith from which the converts enter into the fold of a new and triumphant religion.

Susan Visvanathan's monograph takes an altogether different approach. Instead of linearity, she puts 'dialogue' at the centre of her discussion on conversion and missionary styles. Conversion to Christianity in Kerala is, of course, not a new phenomenon; nor did it begin during the period of British colonialism. In fact, the Syrian or St. Thomas Christians of Kerala trace their tradition to the first century AD. Whatever the literal truth, historians now agree that there was a living tradition of Christianity in Kerala before colonial invasions. They also suggest that in spite of their distinct faith, the Christians in Kerala shared a cultural landscape with the Hindus, participated in the power structure of the state and interpreted the religious messages in such a way that they were not completely divorced from the old sacred order.

Although attempts were made in the earlier period by the Portuguese to control the Syrian Christians, it was towards the latter part of nineteenth century (during the British colonialism), as the author argues, that there was a marked shift in attitude of the missionaries from paternalism to hierarchy and control. This gave rise to and legitimised a missionary style which saw religious conversion in monological terms.

The deliberations of the Centenary Conference of the Protestant Missions of the World held in London in June 1888, which Visvanathan discusses in some detail, clearly reflected this new attitude, the new missionary style which saw conversion to Christianity as a complete negation of all the 'obscurantist' 'heathen' practices. The attitude of the CMS (Church Missionary Society), in this respect, was not significantly different. Although the methods adopted by these missionaries were less violent and aggressive, their attitude towards the Syrian Christians reflected a sense of hierarchy. For these missionaries the important task was to 'rescue' the Syrian Christians from the sad state into which they had fallen due to the contamination caused by Hindu religious practices. These new attitudes, coupled with the intervention of the colonial officials like Colonel Munro, created new tensions between the Syrian Christians and the Hindus in Kerala. New strategies of conversion such as through education, 'vernacularisation' of sacred texts, and through native agents, did very little to alter the notion of conversion. It is natural that many missionaries, as Visvanathan suggests, refused to see conversion as a process of complex negotiations, an intense conversation, which the converts had to undertake with agony and with ecstasy.

It is precisely this conception of religious conversion as continuous dialogue, as a genuine and experiential

engagement with another faith, which the author articulates in the last two sections of the monograph. In contrast both to a colonial missionary style and a monological understanding of religious conversion, the author, through the remarkable life-stories of Krishna Pillai and Henri Le Soux, presents an alternative conception of 'dialogue'.

The story of Krishna Pillai's conversion to Christianity foregrounds the theme of dialogue between faiths as a series of negotiations or, as Visvanathan puts it, as a 'problem of consonance and dissent.' As a Munshi in the missionary station of Sawyerpuram in Tamil Nadu, Pillai came in contact with Christianity but as a practising Vellala Hindu he kept his distance from it. However, gradually the distance gave way to a process of interaction which was full of promise as well as tension. And finally when he received baptism, it was for him both a rupture and a renewal of conversation with the past. If Pillai, through mystical experience, saw the change of faith in somewhat clear terms such as a passage from a 'time of delusion' to the 'realm of divine grace', such clarity was difficult to obtain when he placed himself in the broader cultural context of his society. Although Pillai could create a shared mystical vocabulary between Sri Vaishnavism and Christianity through poetry, the distance and opposition between the two faiths remained.

For Henri Le Soux, however, there was no opposition between Hinduism and Christianity and through his mystical experience he tried to dismantle the doctrinal exclusiveness between the two. In essence, Le Soux/Abhishiktananda's engagement with Hinduism was primarily hermeneutical where religious conversion was seen not as an event and a way of acquiring a new and settled identity, but as a process of continual conversation between the two worlds and an intermingling of horizons. For him, this was also a way of moving back and forth between the two faiths. For Visvanathan, Abhishiktananda's lonely voyage is supremely significant for it shows that it is possible to understand the spiritual experience of the other dialogically through a process of 'seeking and possible revelation'.

Visvanathan's work, I believe, urges us to take religious experience seriously without which any understanding of the 'other' is bound to be abstract and hollow. I entirely agree on this point. I think it is also necessary that the social sciences should open up to and engage with the varied religious experiences of people. However, one feels a little uneasy with the idea that all dialogical understanding of the other should only emanate from and reside within the experiences of an individual. Even conversion as a change of heart cannot be seen merely as something happening inside an individual. How much of Pillai's and Abhishiktananda's experiences are exclusively their own? How can we have access to such revelations without reducing them to mere abstractions? In all fairness to the author, I do not think she is unaware of these problems. But the manner in which various attitudes to the 'other' are presented

in the work, it seems that the escape from a monological reading (which is institutionalised, ideological and so on) of the 'other' lies in the individuated and dialogical experiences of the individuals. If tolerance between religious faiths entails genuine engagement, as Visvanathan believes it should, then it has to be posited on a collective plane where inter-subjective experiences are taken seriously without obliterating the individual selves.

These monographs present a small part of a large project and, as the list indicates, there are many more to come. Anyone dealing with a project of this scale knows that some hard choices about what to omit are inevitable; what matters more is what is done with what is included, and here there is much to admire. One hopes that the Indian Institute of Advanced Study will compile the monographs into a book with a critical introduction and include a few theoretical articles on the questions of faith, religion and so on. Perhaps this will be one way of bringing the varied historical experiences into meaningful interaction.

Bishnu N. Mohapatra

INDIAN POLITICS IN TRANSITION: From Dominance to Chaos by Rekha Saxena. Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994.

HISTORIANS are luckier than political scientists in that they do not have to work at breakneck speed to unravel the mysteries of time and space.

The book under review is one of the few that tries to analyse the complex transition of the Indian party system from Congress-dominance to a multi-party 'chaos'. Apart from its topicality, it has other merits to commend itself: it offers an efficient description of the configuration of parties and the electoral scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s aided by a battery of tabular data and graphic statistical presentation. The general direction of the author's argument is briefly conveyed by the title, but the word 'chaos' seems to have been used as a catchy, emotive and suggestive term rather than as a precise conceptual elaboration.

Moreover, the scholar's attention is almost exclusively focused on the party system and to areas where party political processes are operative, almost to a total exclusion of those areas where the party system has yielded to politics by 'other means', both by private and state actors. Indeed, it is in those areas where institutional politics have broken down that chaos reigns supreme. Again, the book fails to pay greater attention to the issues of party and electoral reform.

The first chapter, 'Transition', is excellently conceptualized but clumsily executed. It identifies, with a broad vision, the following successive models of post-Independence Indian politics: *i*) Congress system (1952-1967); *ii*) coalition model (1967-1971); *iii*) the second one-party dominant model (1971-1977); *iv*) the second coalition model (1977-1979); *v*) the third one-party domi-

nant model (1980-1989); and *vi*) the multi-party system (1989-on). The periodization is broadly defensible, but in lumping together the central and state levels of politics it becomes confusing to a neophyte. Besides, ever since the restoration of party politics in the North East after a period of insurgency and military action, politics in that region has had a broadly coalitional flavour.

The 1991 elections are dealt with in 'Spectrum'. Saxena tends to go overboard in attributing some unique features to them, but except for Seshan's role in trying to curb electoral malpractice, nothing else she mentions was really new in 1991. What happened, for instance, to dynastic succession?

Other chapters deal with the manifestos of the major parties in 1991. 'Issues: Immediate and Remote' are dealt with elsewhere and Chapter 5 gives a detailed discussion of the outcome of the 1991 Lok Sabha elections. 'Diagnosis' draws attention to the emergence of the Congress as the single largest party in 1991, 'the rising crescendo of the BJP', the 'redundancy' of the left, the 'decline of the National Front', the growth of regional parties and their interaction with parties at the national level, and the cumulative effect of these factors in terms of 'the oncoming polarization and increased articulation of the new constellation of forces in the changing Indian political spectrum' (p. 209).

In a perceptive analysis of the Assembly elections of 1993, Saxena points to some important developments around this election such as the dilemmas of the Hindu and Muslim voters, the emergence of the BSP, the 'Lalooization' of U.P. politics and the regionalisation of Indian politics. In the concluding chapter, she deals with coalition (but not minority) governments, among other things, as an immediate prospect in Indian politics. 'An excessive worry over a so-called hung Parliament suggests an innate distaste for coalitions.' This, she observes, 'is unwarranted. ... Coalitions are legitimated and can be purposeful and long-lasting, though mere survival scarcely merits applause. There seems to be an irrational prejudice in India against the coalition pattern which works so well in (some) European countries. What matters is achievement and consensus building towards more participative governance. An extraordinarily diverse and upwardly mobile society, seeking to generate the momentum required to escape from poverty, can only maintain social equilibrium through a continuous process of dynamic transition' (p. 329).

The book is a useful read for both the specialists in this field and all those interested in Indian politics per se.

M.P. Singh

EXPLAINING COMMUNIST CRISIS by Bhupinder Brar. Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1994.

SINCE all political theories are ideological in the sense that they offer particular constructions of the world, prescribed political practices and modes of comprehension, they are

destined to become sites of contestation. But when a political theory such as Marxism, attempts to construct the world in such a radically different image, when it presents such a powerful critique of existing epistemologies and extant practices, when it offers alternatives which encapsulate, as Marx put it, the dreams and the aspirations of the age, then it is likely that it will be caught up in a stream of never-ending internal, as well as external controversies.

Because these controversies are about different ways of representing the world, it is obvious that Marxism, which could think within the frame of modernity about issues such as emancipation in different ways, has been at the centre of many storms. These storms are not only epistemological in the sense of how the world is represented, but because attempts were made in various parts of the world to institutionalize the ideas of Marxism, these debates are important because they are political. The demise of existing socialist societies has brought this out explicitly. It has become almost impossible to comprehend, evaluate or judge the experiment these societies had launched, given the triumphant mood in liberal circles that the death of these societies was implicit in their birth.

Bhupinder Brar argues quite correctly that scholarship on communism has been vitiated by Cold War partisanship. Now that this war is over, he suggests, it is important to return to considerations such as what it was that the communist movement undertook and underwent when it was united, and after it fell apart. For this it is important that scholars of communist studies re-evaluate their own explanatory frameworks.

When explaining why splits took place in the movement, Brar, through wide-ranging critiques of influential modes of explanation, uses the concepts of hegemony and the 'inversion of hegemony' to explain the fate of the communist movement. The establishment of direction and leadership of one group, the internalization of the values of this group which makes hegemonized members lose conceptual tools for constructing and preserving alternative pictures of the universe, the loss of the protest element which follows from this internalization and the evocation of voluntary compliance with these values is termed by the author as hegemony.

As the Bolshevik party acquired hegemony, argues the author, the Comintern provided the forum for the application of its values and organizational strategy on a global level. Thus these values were not only accepted as superior to others, the possibilities of alternatives was ruled out. The centralization of the communist movement into one movement and the adoption of the international line during the Comintern congresses shrouded the need to develop locally relevant initiatives. Brar calls this the inversion of hegemony. This in turn led to the splits in the 1960s. The Chinese, he argues, were not disputing Soviet leadership of the camp, they were 'merely questioning Khrushchev's presumption that leadership gave him an exclusive right to unilat-

erally announce and bring about any fundamental shifts, including those which involved total alteration in the ideological orientation of the camp. Even when the Sino-Soviet polemics had reached their most bitter level, China was asking for its right, along with all other members of the camp, to participate in discussion(s)' (p. 45).

The argument that the reasons for the breakdown of the alliance has to be sought in the nature of the camp itself is a compelling one. It has a great deal to do with the nature of the alliance, the degree of participation of the members in the taking of decisions, and the absence of democratic principles underlying the construction of alliances across independent communist parties – 'The Chinese willingness to resolve differences was stonewalled by Soviet inflexibility.... There seems to be no alternative to creating a new centre of hegemonic authority' (p. 93).

The Indian case illustrates the manner in which struggles over hegemonic control between powerful allies can affect the future of other participants in the movement. Earlier, the support of the Soviets and the Chinese towards the Nehru government made it easy for the CPI to qualify as both (bourgeois) nationalist and (communist) internationalist at the same time. China's dispute with both India and the Soviet Union at the same time, however, created a problem for the average member of the party in India. Any criticism of the national bourgeoisie was likely to be termed not only as pro-Chinese and hence unpatriotic, but also as anti-Soviet, and hence presumably anti-communist.

This suited the Indian government who could stall criticism of its policies by labelling such criticism as unpatriotic. So even if the members of the group themselves did not support the Chinese they were termed so, both by the Indian government and the Soviets. In an attempt to counter this suggestion, Brar cites a statement by the breakaway group that it was an independent group of the movement and that 'No question of either a pro-Peking or pro-Moscow shall arise... until our party concludes its inner party discussions and arrives at its own conclusions' (p. 115). The CPI(M) did not adopt a stand on the Sino-Soviet issue for as long as three years after setting itself up as an independent party, which led the Chinese to declare that there is no communist party in India only individual communists. The 1967 documents of the CPI(M) showed its focus on the domestic situation, the distancing from both the CPSU and the CCP and, more importantly, the fact that it resented the imposition of diktats by the CPSU or the CCP. Brar argues that the denunciation of the CCP by the CPI(M) in 1969 showed that the party was never pro-Chinese, either in word or deed.

Coming to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the author is controversial when he argues that Gorbachov saw himself as a committed Bolshevik. 'He took from Bolshevism what was best in it and considered it (sic) intrinsic: he filtered out what was wrong and sinister in it and considered it only incidental' (p. 187). To portray Gorbachov, generally seen as the person who deliberately dismantled the

Leninist legacy, as someone who was in the best Bolshevik tradition of socialist and democratic values and as someone who wanted to demolish the layers of silt, such as corruption, is highly problematical. And to describe him as an emancipated member of the hegemonic universe is equally difficult. And to further chart the woes of the people in the country in the 1980s and the 1990s as due to the naïveté of Gorbachov as Brar does, is frankly not persuasive.

Brar's explanation of the splits in the movement make sense. His explanation of the events within the Soviet Union raise problems rather than interpreting the paradox which was the structuring of communism in the erstwhile USSR. This is because hegemony has been read in this work in a one-dimensional manner. Hegemony in the Gramscian mode is not only about the establishment of leadership, it is about the establishment of *convincing* leadership, because the leaders keep in touch with the aspirations of the people, and change their strategies and their thinking accordingly. It is about responsiveness and receptivity, and the creation of channels of communication between the rulers and the ruled.

It is a tragic commentary that the explanation that Gramsci offered for the overthrow of Czarist Russia – that is, the lack of hegemony – can be used to explain the overthrow of the Soviet state. And this had to do with the kind of centralized state apparatus that had been set up, an apparatus that in its obsession with power could not see that the power equations in society had been radically restructured. And so the Soviet state became irrelevant as the Czarist state had become irrelevant many years before – a case of history repeating itself and in the process becoming a farce. Therefore, hegemony has far more dimensions than Brar outlines in this work.

Neera Chandhoke

SOVIET RELATIONS WITH INDIA AND VIETNAM, 1945-1992 by Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993

SOVIET COLLAPSE: Implications for India edited by Bhupinder Brar. Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1993.

SUPERPOWER relations dominated global politics after the Second World War, until the end of the second Cold War. Tensions and rivalries between states were expressed in terms of the antagonisms that existed between the two superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union. But this system was also heterogeneous in terms of power relationships (strategic, monetary, industrial, military, etc.). Regional rivalries, independent of the superpowers, also existed which sought to use this rivalry to their own advantage.

South and South East Asia, both colonized regions before the Second World War, were for different reasons and at different levels, the focus of superpower rivalries during the Cold War. In this context, countries with special

relationships with the Soviet Union, like India and Vietnam, were studied by strategic planners and analysts in official and academic institutions in both superpowers and elsewhere.

The purpose of both the books reviewed is to examine the relationship of the Soviet Union with her 'allies' – India and Vietnam as one case study, and analyse the implications of the Soviet collapse for these states in the framework of global politics. In the wake of the Soviet collapse and the prevailing belief in the irrevocable triumph of capitalism, it might be pertinent to review a model of development once offered as an alternative to developing countries

Much has been written about Soviet perceptions and policies towards both India and Vietnam (R. Remnek, S. Clarkson, R. Kanet, E. Valkenier, et al.). Thakur and Thayer continue this tradition by examining at great lengths the works by Soviet scholars on the political, military, and economic aspects of India and Vietnam. They construct a fairly comprehensive picture of the Soviet image of India and Vietnam

The Soviets through the 1960s and 1970s theorised that a path of non-capitalist development could be pursued by third world states. This would lead to a more just and equitable society in contrast to the class divided system resulting from capitalism. Such a system was to be based on a national-democratic state, with a worker-peasant-middle class alliance under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie. The regime would be based on radical social and economic reforms, like land reforms and a mixed economy with a growing public sector. Its foreign policy would be anti-imperialist and be coordinated with those of other developing countries with a pro-Soviet inclination. Of course, Soviet assistance to development projects, as well as military and strategic aid would be, and were, offered to states opting for this path.

Western scholars have tended to view the special relations of the Soviet Union with third world states as expansionism, without accounting for the bilateral nature of this relationship. Thakur and Thayer's book does not suffer from this fault. Third world states relied on the Soviets for a number of reasons including the attempt to shake off their dependency on their erstwhile colonizers and western powers. Leaders of third world countries accepted Soviet aid and bilateral ties but did not follow the Soviet model completely. They tried to take advantage of Cold War rivalries to build capitalism on more favourable terms while keeping intact the existing power structures in their states. Thakur and Thayer's work gives a revealing account of this and thus differs from earlier western works on the subject.

They analyse public opinion and debates among Indian scholars to strengthen their argument and do not label India's economic path as 'socialist', and then reject it. They submit that the Indian public sector 'has been instrumental in transforming an exploited plantation economy at independence into a vibrant, virtually self-reliant and

diversified industrial power....' Figures are cited to show that both India and the Soviet Union benefited from their joint ventures. Similarly, Vietnam's economic relations with the Soviet Union and their impact on the system are analysed.

The chapters on the military relationship of the Soviet Union with both India and Vietnam are especially well documented. The authors not only cite official texts and SIPRI catalogues, but also give details of the debates around the NPT and the nuclear issue in India and Vietnam, quoting from both the 'hawks' and the 'doves', to show the heterogeneity of positions on the issue. This is a welcome contrast to works which advocate just one view.

It is Thakur and Thayer's engagement with internal debates on domestic politics and political economy, when they deal with the tri-lateral relationship of India, Vietnam and the Soviet Union, which makes this work a valuable contribution to the field of international politics.

The postscript of this book, written as it was after the Soviet collapse, sums up the consequences of the collapse rather hurriedly. But this does not detract from the strengths of this otherwise well-balanced work.

Bhupinder Brar's book suffers from unevenness, a common bane of edited volumes. Brar's own article on 'Soviet collapse, world order and India's options', argues that the 'new world order' is essentially a multipolar world. He cites economic statistics to show the weakness of the USA, which indicate the flaws in the concept of a unipolar world. Brar's work uses logic and there is a fondness for building possible scenarios. Navneeta Chadha's article is based entirely on scenario building, a favourite preoccupation of realists.

Girijesh Pant makes sound comments on the world economy in the aftermath of the collapse. His assessment and predictions include the belief: that the USA will be unable to dominate the post Cold War world, that regional blocs will have a distinct status and role to play in the new configuration of forces, and that the newly industrialised countries will become increasingly important. He accounts for technological innovation and conflicts and contradictions in the international system. Pant's belief that structural changes are going to affect not only the developing world but also the developed economies, appears reasonable but needs to be explained further, perhaps in another article. Shanti Swarup and Yogendra Yadav's contributions are based on their own theoretical frameworks and opinion. Both make a plea that Indian intellectuals and the left movement should respond creatively to the Soviet collapse.

Some of the articles in Brar's collection tend to be wordy rather than analytical. But the volume as a whole reflects the anxiety among Indian scholars after the Soviet collapse and the emergence of new power structures of globalization.

Anuradha M. Chenoy

THE INDIAN OCEAN: A History of People and the Sea by Kenneth McPherson. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993.

EXTERNAL COMPULSIONS OF SOUTH ASIAN POLITICS edited by Shelton U Kodikara. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1993.

OF ALL the oceans in the world, the Indian Ocean remains the least articulated and the most enigmatic from the point of view of history. This is ironic considering its central role in moulding world events. The seminal social, religious, cultural, commercial and imperial impulses, spawned in this ocean littoral and its hinterlands over the past five millennia of recorded history – their transmission facilitated by the oceanic highways – made possible the linking of East and West and the emergence of an international system as we know it. The Ocean also forged the shared interests of disparate peoples, communities and countries and, in our day, has prompted the emergence of McLuhan's 'global village'.

The reasons for the Indian Ocean not being accorded its due place in the sun are easily discerned. It has a far too fragmented history reflecting the sheer diversity of peoples, cultures and values on its rim. And the indigenous 'Eastern' history was mostly of the oral variety. The result? A holistic account, untainted by the Europeanist bias (which deemed the history of this region before the advent of the European as 'pre-modern' and, by implication, inconsequential), was difficult to piece together.

There was thus a crying need for a study such as this one. But, the danger in attempting a historical survey was that the larger picture could easily be swamped by exotica and the vivid detail. Kenneth McPherson, an Australian academic, avoids these pitfalls in his sympathetic and comprehensive treatment of the subject. His wide-ranging and well-written book is a pioneering effort.

McPherson's main thesis is that trade, dating back 5000 years to the linkages between the Indus Valley and the Mesopotamian civilizations, provided the impetus and facilitated the interaction between the peoples of the littoral. It led to cultural diffusion and the evolving of an organic and distinct Indian Ocean community. This process, he maintains, was disrupted by the coming of the European traders in the 17th century and followed by rival European colonialist ventures. These disturbed the mostly peaceful ethos within the region and created ripples in the ocean-induced socio-cultural life.

The sub-text, however, is more interesting. McPherson implies that the sharing of cultural values and the background of amicable relations precluded extended wars, imperial ventures, and other such crass enterprises between the littoral societies. And that the European, not so acculturated, aggressively sought to, and succeeded in, subjugating the littoral peoples who had no reason to antici-

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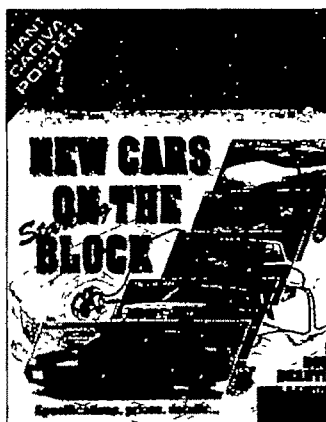
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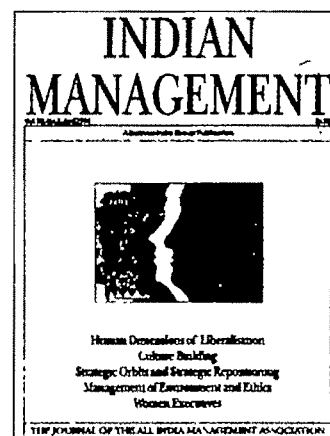
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pate that this outsider's maritime trade, which began by plugging into the native systems of exchange, would end up dominating the oceanic commerce and eliminate their sovereignties. At the end of the colonial era, the Europeans withdrew from the ocean but left behind animosities, not organic to the milieu, but spawned by arbitrary map redrawings, imposing modern nation states on a congeries of peoples with overlapping cultures.

Going from the general to the particular, the second book looks at precisely the externally generated pressures on the centrally located part of the Indian Ocean region – South Asia. This collection of essays of indifferent quality, although competently edited by the distinguished Sri Lankan political scientist, Shelton U. Kodikara is, for my money, based on the wrong premise, namely, that the international system is now unipolar, implying thereby a role in the region for the United States of America – the 'sole super power'.

Americans may have the wherewithal but do they have the will to stay the course when the going gets hot? Recall that the American expeditionary forces fled Somalia after only a few casualties inflicted by a bunch of ill-equipped tribal irregulars. This presumption informs most of the writing including the chapter by Professor S.D. Muni. It is embroidered somewhat by the contention of the Pakistani scholar Rasul Rais, in his context-setting chapter, that the end of the Cold War notwithstanding, 'the triangular global system' featuring the US, Russia and China still prevails.

An even more troubling premise is that the subcontinental countries, unable to reconcile their differences, may have to call in extra-regional entities (US, UN, et al.) to arbitrate their quarrels. These two questionable beliefs are held by the other Pakistani contributor, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, as well.

Cheema goes on to offer two designs for abiding peace between India and Pakistan. He proposes a final partition of Jammu and Kashmir along the Chenab River. His second scheme moots the absorption of what is now POK and the northern areas into Pakistan, of Jammu and Ladakh into India, and for the Srinagar Valley to become an UN trusteeship territory for 10 years with a plebiscite thereafter to decide its eventual status. All such theoretical solutions will do as an intellectual exercise but divorced from a consideration of what is politically feasible, as distinct from what is desirable, they serve little purpose.

Muni, in his chapter on the 'strategic dimensions' of the Indo-US relations, flogs his questionable belief of a generally benign American interest in South Asia. He is not only categorical in his assertion that Washington has for now and evermore forsaken the plebiscite option for Kashmir, but goes on to posit a dependency relationship because of India's need for 'newer technologies in defence and civilian fields.' Of course, all this flies in the face of indications that the US would prefer nothing better than

to have an 'independent' Kashmir to secure a stable American presence in the region and that the economic reforms have not disturbed the still strong and critical military technology relationship with Russia. So much for JNU academics trying to escape the failed promise of socialism and Soviet friendship by jumping into the American embrace!

Mahinda Werake, a Sri Lankan analyst writing on China and South Asia, makes the dubious claim that the Chinese have sought to de-activate the disputed border with India because they want to foster a regional environment conducive to economic development at home and to trade with South Asia. The alternative and far more persuasive thesis Werake has not looked at is that China waxed peaceful only after the Sromdurong Chu incidents in 1987 when the Indian Army reacted aggressively to Chinese forays into Arunachal Pradesh. There is enough evidence to suggest that the Chinese military concluded thereafter that they could not bully India and opted instead for making peaceful noises.

Surprisingly for a well known American South Asia specialist, Leo Rose contends that the US, Russia and China are all equally for normalization of relations between South Asian nations and for the status quo. But status quo in the subcontinent is precisely what prevents relations from normalizing!

There are two thought-provoking essays in this book. One is by the editor himself, who correctly sources the security dilemma of South Asian states to the fact that (i) the region is 'militarily Indo-centric in character,' and therefore (ii) countries on the periphery seek to maximise security vis a vis India, even as (iii) India 'seeks to regionalize security within a subcontinental framework,' whence the tensions in South Asia.

The other is the sophisticated analysis by the Bangladeshi scholar, Shaikat Hassan, who writes that 'Problems of instability' and widespread discontent are created by 'differential development' seeded by 'parochial attachments' clashing with the national policies enunciated by the new elites. This has exacerbated, he says, the fractionation of South Asian societies and energized the inherent tendencies towards ethnicism and separatism which, in turn, undermines the realization of larger South Asian interests, like common economic space.

He recommends that, among other things, structural changes in government be effected to prevent majoritarian tyranny, government power be decentralised, cultural jingoism be eliminated and state ideologies conforming to the interests of the dominant sections be given the heave-ho. These solutions have the merit of putting the onus for collective peace on the countries in the region, demanding that each of them change policies and mindsets, rather than perennially point fingers at one another.

Bharat Karnad

Comment

C B MUTHAMMA

MANY people in this country seem to think that if you have elections you have democracy. They forget that most dictators in the business had elections: Marcos of the Philippines, sundry Pakistani and Latin American dictators and many others, including the party dictatorships of the erstwhile communist countries.

The Indian system is somewhat more sophisticated in that, from time to time, it does change the parties running governments. But in essence it is neither representative nor accountable. These two fundamentals are built into the system. Every government in Delhi since Independence had less than 50 per cent of the electoral votes cast. The situation in the states is worse and it is normal for governments to be formed on the basis of a little over 30 per cent of the votes cast. This is because, given the diversities of our population, there are, inevitably, several parties vying for votes, with the possible addition of independent candidates (often dissidents denied party tickets). So we have the first-

past-the post system, which means that almost always the views of the large majority of the people who vote (even if we do not count those who do not vote) are left out of the process of government formation.

This naturally leads to the building of vote-banks on sectoral lines. In reverse, this means that the section of the electorate which ensures success to a party feels it is in power and will try to assert itself. It will be recalled that after the 1995 victory of the Janata Dal in Karnataka, when the election for the leadership of the legislature party was won by Deve Gowda, a Vokkaliga, his jubilant Vokkaliga supporters celebrated the victory by attacking the losing candidate, Hegde, with brickbats. Not only was this done in the Vidhan Soudha, the new Chief Minister found it expedient not to discipline or censure the attackers.

Political parties in their pursuit of legislative majorities increasingly resort to methods that advance party, and harm national, interests. A reference has been made to the

building of vote-banks, giving rise to parties promoting the interests of this or that religious, linguistic or caste group, or of sections of the under-privileged of various categories. There are promoters of class-warfare, of which there are different forms – whether an imported variety that is difficult to fit into the Indian situation or a local variety that proposes to protect the rights of the backward.

One of the most interesting examples of the sectoral vote-bank phenomenon is a Maharashtrian political party that began by denouncing the Tamils settled in Bombay, later it demanded the ouster of non-Maharashtrians, and currently targets the Muslims as objects of hatred. What is most notable in all these programmes is that the sections whose interests the parties claim to promote have not advanced much in nearly half a century of such 'promotion'. All the groups whose backwardness or sense of insecurity has been such a convenient instrument for various parties, remain backward, because the parties have no real long-term programme of overcoming the backwardness of the target group.

The untouchables, for instance, are beguiled with promises of reservations. Reservation of jobs or educational opportunities in favour of untouchables has been in operation for over four decades. Yet the large body of untouchables continues to remain untouchable. To begin with, if they are 10 per cent of the population, which would put their numbers currently over 90 million, how long would it take to solve their problem through reservation which can only touch a minute proportion of the population, including new generations of these underprivileged people coming up? What is more, the really backward and underprivileged among them – the vast majority who are illiterate, unskilled, poor, underfed and generally deprived – cannot have any access to the reserved seats.

There is also the fact, not admitted by the self-appointed political spokesmen for the underprivileged, that they have a vested interest in keeping them underprivileged so that their votes can be bought with populist promises like reservation. The real solution, namely, to educate, train and uplift the entire community, brings no immediate returns in votes, quite apart from being a difficult, long, and unspectacular haul. In more recent years, small numbers of the backwards who have moved to the forefront of politics have used the same tactics. They, too, speak up for the underprivileged but show no sign of providing the real solution. The fact that they themselves come from the underprivileged community in question is only an added advantage in the kind of politics we have.

The politics of vote-banks has given rise to increasing conflict in society, creating a nation at war with itself. The populace spends its resources and energies in destroying rather than developing itself. Development requires peace, security and national solidarity. Our politics ensures that we have none of these. Progress, to be meaningful, has to ensure that there is a growth that provides

educational and employment opportunities for all, replacing the present static situation of inadequacy, where the gain of anyone can only be at the cost of someone else – a situation made for conflict and the functioning of the politics of conflict.

The parties do not merely stop at splitting the country into mutually warring, destructive groups. They spend vast quantities of the nation's resources in various 'melas' and 'yatras' of different kinds to promote the respective parties. Huge unaccounted sums are spent on elections in which the supporters and hangers-on of the parties also make money. Parties build up links with providers of money especially those with black money who, in return, get patronage and protection. There are kick-backs and scams, which rarely get unravelled. Parties have links with criminals, gangsters and lumpen elements who fight off rival parties at all levels, help rig elections and undertake ventures for their patrons which no decent human being should be capable of.

All this adds up not just to criminalisation of politics, but to a creeping criminalisation of the whole of society and life in general. There are recognisable signs of mafia-rule at all levels. The situation is made infinitely worse by the helplessness of vast sections of the population, especially the poor and illiterate. In this context of distress and helplessness in the face of criminalisation, the average citizen feels that the only way to survive is to come to terms with things as they are, and, if possible, cultivate patrons and influence. The alternative is to get out of the country, which only a few can do.

Even after elections, the pattern of politicking continues. If the largest party in the legislature does not have an overall majority, it proceeds to engineer defections from other parties with offers of ministerial office or payments of huge sums of unaccounted money. Defectors do not need much persuasion, since, given the kind of system we have, it brings into politics the kind of person whose sole objective is to win office and money. To him the party is a stepping stone to fulfil his personal ambitions and the country only a field where the party can play for power. This being so, even within winning parties, those who have not won ministerial or other office are at logger-heads with those who have, and with the party itself. To avoid open dissidence or even rebellion, the heads of legislative parties resort to all kinds of devices. There have been instances when members of legislative parties have been locked up to prevent them being accessible to rival parties which might lure them away.

It is also quite normal for governments to accommodate as many of their party legislators as possible. So we get outsize cabinets, cutting large holes in the treasury just to keep a particular PM/CM in office. Such supporters are appointed as chairmen of public sector enterprises or of statutory bodies. In the legislatures, parties discuss issues, not on merits, but on a party basis. The opposition attacks

the government wherever possible to prove it wrong and the government will stolidly defend even indefensible measures undertaken for party benefit. There have been cases where representatives of a regional party in Parliament have consistently supported the government as long as mutual party understanding holds. But when it is terminated and those representatives vote with the opposition, they denounce policies which they had earlier supported – rather like the Indian communist party which withdrew support from India's freedom movement when Britain and the Soviet Union became allies in the war

Since the candidates for elections are chosen by the parties, not the people, they are naturally answerable to the parties, not the people. The role of parties in getting their candidates elected is so important, particularly because of monetary and organisational support, that they can get them elected even from constituencies where they do not reside and where they are not known.

There is a dual process of a high degree of centralisation which minimises the role of the people in their own governance. Firstly, under the governmental structure, both power and money are concentrated in the hands of the government. Both are doled out as considered appropriate. Secondly, and more importantly, the party is a centralising factor. At whatever level of elections, from the national to the level of the panchayat, parties pick and finance their candidates and usually designate chief ministers and other heads of governments down the line. And because of their political power, they interfere in the functioning of the administration and the police, and even the judiciary

The net result of this political structure is that the legislatures, including the governments and the opposition, are neither representative of the people nor accountable to them. They represent and are accountable to their parties.

Given the total and continuous preoccupation of every party – and every individual in it – with how to get into power and remain there, not just during elections but between elections as well, the one thing for which they have no time is the governance of the country. Lip-service is paid to all the right ideals – prosperity, equality, abolition of untouchability, protection of tribals and their cultures, preservation of forests and so on, but in actual fact all these ideals are continuously negated. The persisting widespread poverty, illiteracy and backwardness are a direct result of the kind of politics we have, and the kind of governments produced by our politics.

Thus at the end of nearly half a century of independence, our per capita income is among the lowest in the world. About 40 per cent of our population lives below the poverty level and as of today, even with economic liberalisation, there is no prospect of a change in their situation in the foreseeable future. India is at the top of the international list in all negative indicators of progress – amongst the highest rates of illiteracy, bonded labour, child labour, blindness, polio, and much else. Though nominal

efforts are being made as lip-service to literacy and other ideals, or under pressure from western countries to abolish child labour, there is no credible remedy in sight for any of these problems. All our public institutions such as the bureaucracy, the police and much else are caught up in the culture of corruption, criminalisation and non-performance. Even the judiciary and our system of justice has no credibility

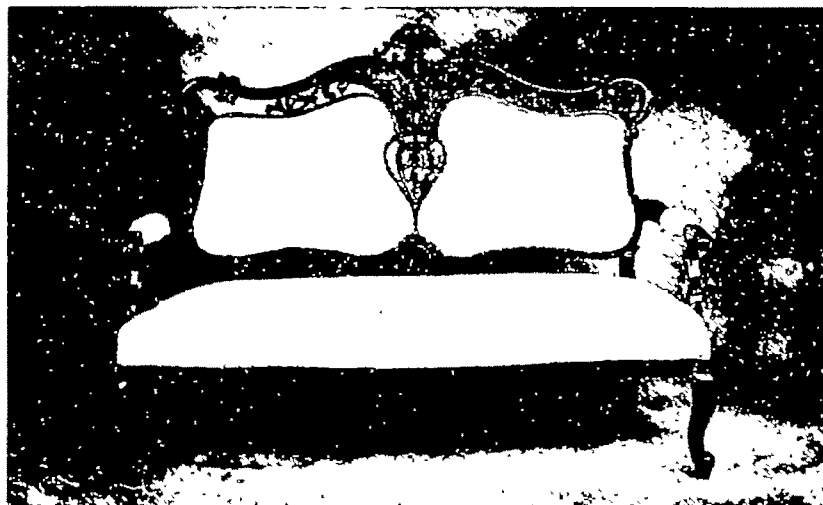
If there is one feature of the system which, more than any other, is the source of all these problems, it is the formation of governments based on standing party majorities in the legislatures. If this one source of mischief could be removed and the promotion of governments could be based on a non-party election of the head of government (preferably by a direct vote of the electorate by an absolute majority) the entire working of elections and of governments would be different. Majorities in the legislatures would be linked only to voting on individual matters of policy, with a defeat relating only to the policy, not to the head of government.

If the formation of a government is delinked from a standing legislative party majority there would no longer be any need for parties to pursue such legislative majorities, with all the illegalities and anti-national methods associated with this pursuit. On the other hand, a party as party, without the prospect of power, cannot command donations whether black or white, because it cannot hold out prospects of patronage or protection for criminal and lumpen types. In the circumstances, even with a party label, the candidates will get elected on their merits, since the electorate will have no reason to vote for the party. Rigging of elections will have a considerably less utility to parties. In the legislatures, the members, regardless of party, will consider issues on merits, since there will not be a situation of party rivalry for power.

In the nearly half a century that it has been free, India has fallen behind other countries and is way behind the times. Unless we change the system that is demonstrably working against the country's interests, things can only get worse. Laws stipulating clean elections already exist but are routinely flouted with impunity. Legislation to stop defections has not achieved its objective because the incentives for defections are strong and continue to exist. Laws that might be envisaged for controlling illegal methods of collecting funds for parties such as commercial kick-backs or black money donations by smugglers and their ilk can also be easily circumvented. The obvious solution is to tackle the reason why these illegal methods are employed – the incentive of party power and party governments.

Our Constitution has been amended innumerable times, but on peripheral issues. It is becoming increasingly urgent to bring in amendments that will establish governments freed from the continuous pressure of party rivalries and manipulation, so that we can have stability and genuinely people-oriented policies and governance.

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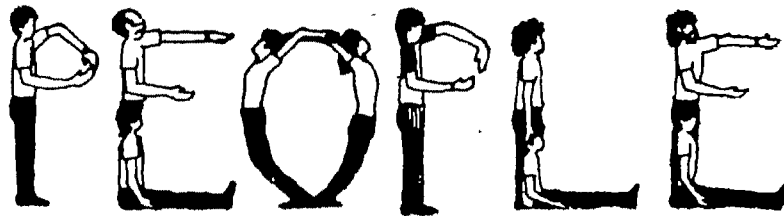
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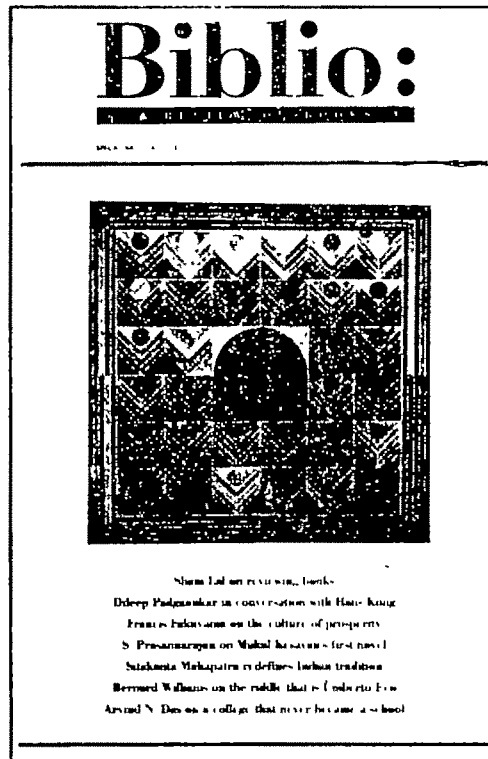
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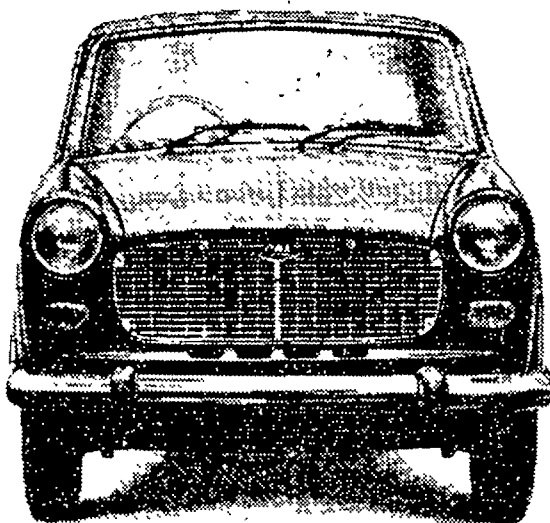
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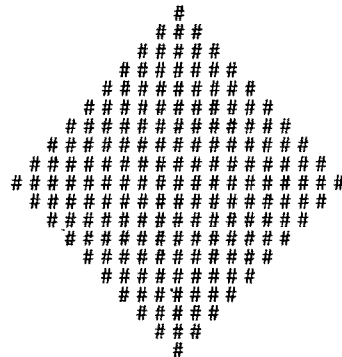
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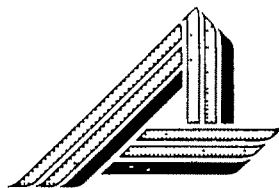
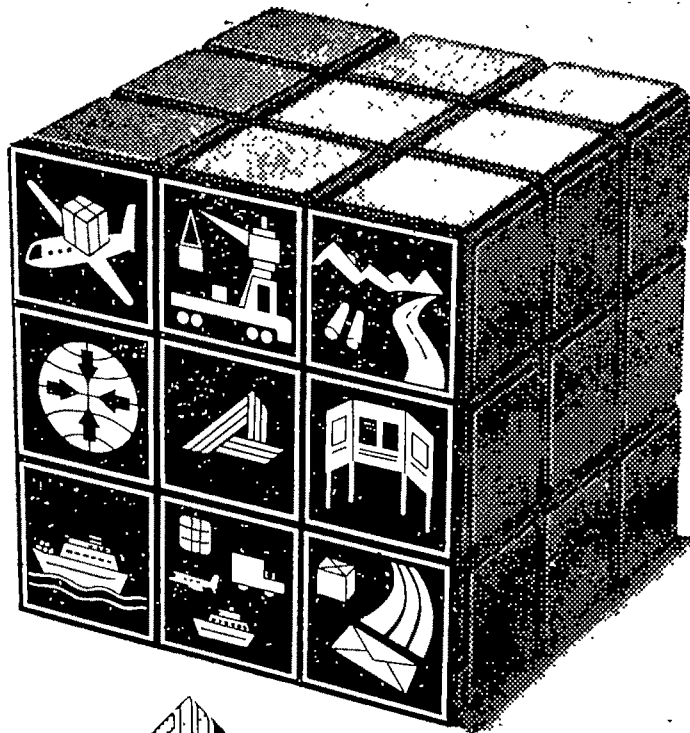


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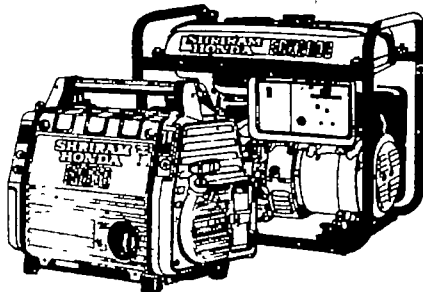
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LEARNING TO CHANGE

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The problem

THE HISTORY of education since Independence offers numerous examples of good ideas for reform being killed by neglect or design. Indeed, it may be difficult to name a good idea that has not already been discussed by one of the many commissions or committees appointed since 1947. Both our economy and our political system have suffered due to the neglect of educational reform. The air of cynicism that hangs in the cultural climate of modern, especially urban, India also owes a great deal to our dismal performance on the educational front. As time passes, reform in education becomes increasingly difficult, partly because of this air of cynicism but also because problems which only a reformed system could solve get worse.

It is a tragic irony that the country which symbolized self-reliance among the new nation-states of the post-War

world is now dependent on soft loans and aid from abroad for improving elementary education. The government seems determined to privatize higher education. What forms these malignant trends will take is not difficult to predict. Pumping of foreign funds, copious as they always tend to be, into rural elementary schools will most likely breed corruption, disingenuity and lack of imagination. And only pure optimism can lead us to believe that private universities will behave differently from our infamous 'capitation fee' colleges.

It may be a moot question why change or reform in the system of education has proved so hard to achieve. Certainly, we need to enquire into the historical conditions responsible for stifling innovative ideas in education.

Voluntary work has been an important source of innovation in education. From Tagore's Shantiniketan to

Kishore Bharati's science teaching project in Madhya Pradesh which later took the shape of Eklavya, a number of stories exemplifying the potential of voluntary work are available. If such stories do not find a place in this issue, the reason is certainly not for lack of respect. Voluntary effort is important as it brings together dedication and inventiveness. Due to this combination, voluntary institutions often set too high an example for ordinary functionaries of the system to follow. Also, the achievement of voluntary organizations is geographically specific, and efforts made to replicate their work elsewhere rarely attain success. Voluntary initiative is an important source of inspiration rather than direction.

The purpose of this issue of SEMINAR, however, is somewhat different. The focus here is on the nature and logic of some of the good ideas available today, rather than

on why good ideas did not work. Perhaps in the process of examining these ideas, one might come closer to identifying the conditions they might require for growth. One must note that the absence of congenial circumstances is important, but this cannot be the only reason for the failure of a plan. Inertia and resistance must also be recognized as reasons contributing to failure, but more important than all of these perhaps is the urge to change. There is no objective method for studying the extent to which such an urge is present in society. When the effort required for change is to be led by the government, as in the case of educational change, the task of recognizing the social urge for change becomes even more difficult. In the absence of a yardstick to decide how strongly change in education is desired, we can entertain the hope and belief that talking about change sharpens the urge for it.

Listening to Gandhi

KRISHNA KUMAR

AS THE world approaches the close of this century, many ideas practised and preached by Mahatma Gandhi are becoming increasingly relevant as guides to state policy. The most interesting, and understandably controversial, of his favourite ideas is that of local self-reliance.

In a world said to have become interdependent, local self-reliance seems irrelevant, indeed heretical. Yet the fact remains that the world is not really interdependent. Many countries of the South are caught in a debt-trap which forces them to part with a substantial portion of their national income to pay the interest they owe the North. This ghastly compulsion impoverishes these countries further, rendering their labour force and natural resources steadily more vulnerable. In the so-called global village, the real village is dependent on the city for such essential needs of life as work and health care. Gandhi's insistence on local self-reliance was precisely in such basic aspects of life. The world is armed today with sophisti-

cated technological solutions to every human problem, yet the majority of people suffer from malnutrition, unemployment and chronic illness. This obvious contradiction suggests that Gandhi's plea for local self-reliance in the matter of basic needs deserves to be heard again.

A second salient feature of Gandhi's legacy is the importance of imaginative action. If there is such a thing as a Gandhian theory, surely it is a theory of action which emphasizes role-playing with earnestness and imagination. All of Gandhi's major political and social battles, starting with his work in South Africa, illustrate this point. In retrospect, these battles look crafted to perfection as localized socio-dramas with a universal appeal. The salt *satyagraha* is probably the best known example of such a battle, but numerous smaller episodes occurred

The field notes, on which this article is based, were collected by Snehlata Gupta and Malvika Rai under the auspices of a study assisted by the Unicef Regional Office, Kathmandu.

throughout Gandhi's life. For example, when the engine installed for running the press at Phoenix Farm in South Africa failed, Gandhi successfully mobilized his colleagues to run the press manually all night so that *Indian Opinion* would come out on time. This early event suggests two other aspects of Gandhi's theory of action, apart from commitment to one's role. One is his insistence on autonomy which translates into freedom from dependence on any single option. The other is persistence. If one looks at Gandhi's life from a pedagogical perspective, one can aptly describe it as a long lesson in the value of the freedom of initiative and tenacity to the cause at hand.

Finally, Gandhi's legacy must remind us of the significance of the spatial community and the family. Child welfare – indeed, all human welfare – has its locus in these two units of collective life in Gandhi's picture of the world. Democracy, both as a system of governance and as a way of living, depends on the expression it finds in these two units. As Marjorie Sykes, probably the best commentator on Gandhi's educational thought, reminded a symposium¹ a few years back, Gandhi's idea of democratic living depends on the possibility of a face-to-face dialogue among the members of a community. This ideal is, of course, ancient, having been established by the Greek philosophers, but its meaning and potential are yet to be realised in our age even though our world seems to have espoused democracy as the only worthwhile form of government.

In his last book, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), John Dewey – whose educational theory meets Gandhi's proposal on many crucial counts, talked about the difficulties that the 20th century was facing in letting the spatial community stay alive and relevant to human life.² During the last decade or so, many nation-

states have woken up to the damage modern planning of societies has done to local communities and the family, leaving the child to be cared for by the faceless state. As we plan redress, we can find an important resource of ideas and inspiration in Gandhi's legacy.

The model of children's education that flows from Gandhi's vision of a desirable society strikingly matches the most important implications that one might draw from modern child psychology for organizing or reforming the system of education. These implications can be listed in the following manner:

- * The child's immediate milieu must serve as a resource for the re-discovery of accepted knowledge;
- + Children must have the freedom to create their own models of knowledge about the world;
- * Learning must provide for opportunities for children to be physically active;
- * Classroom activities must resonate and extend the child's life at home and in its surroundings.

Gandhi's choice of the local as the appropriate context for the exercise of initiative and persistence suggests an obvious parallel to the concepts of exploration and reconstruction we find in Piaget's psycho-philosophy of knowledge. Parallels can also be drawn between the links that Dewey perceived between children's learning of subject matter and their milieu on one hand, and Gandhi's view of the school as an institutionalized forum of the community, on the other.

These parallels were reflected in the proposal Gandhi made in the specific context of education, but the proposal had another item which was related to his economics and his own early experience of teaching children at Phoenix and Tolstoy Farms in South Africa. This concerned the introduction of handicrafts as an organizing principle of the school curriculum. Much has been written on this aspect of Gandhi's *nai talim* or 'new education' which is also known as 'basic education'. In summary, the idea of traditional handicrafts providing an axis for the school's daily curriculum had in it

the following elements which formed its rationale:

- * Bridging the school with the world of work;
- * Imparting an activity orientation to the curriculum; and
- * Inculcating a sense of self-reliance.

Historical documents concerning the attempt made between the late '30s and the late '50s to give a 'basic' orientation to India's education system refer to several questions and problems that arose in the wake of Gandhi's idea of using handicrafts as the organizing principle of the curriculum. Some of the questions might seem to have merely a historical value today, but they are nevertheless worth recording. The most controversial question was whether the introduction of handicrafts can make the school an economically productive institution.

Gandhi had, in fact, suggested that productive activity centred in traditional handicrafts could enable the school to sustain itself financially. A lot of hostility that basic education programmes had to face undoubtedly arose from this idea, its opponents arguing that productive schools would become factories of child labour. Historically, it would appear that Gandhi's emphasis on making schools self-sustaining was related to his understandable repugnance towards the use of revenue earned from the sale of liquor for children's education.

As time went by and experience showed both the practical difficulties and limitations of using children's manual work to generate financial resources, the idea took the form of contribution towards school upkeep. Apparently, even this was not acceptable to many, as we can deduce from an official publication written by G. Ramachandran, an eminent exponent of Basic Education. In a monograph published by the Government of India in 1957, he wrote that 'the main object of productive work is education through such work and income is only a corollary.' He also took pains to clarify that the productive work given to children 'should be such that children can do it without any undue physical strain...

¹ The written version of this speech appeared in *Democracy and Education in India* edited by Krishna Kumar and published by Radiant, Delhi (1993) under the auspices of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

² John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt, 1927, reprint, Athens: Swallow Press, Ohio University, 1991).

Sweated child labour is the very negation of Basic education and will defeat it completely.³

This controversy over productive manual work need not divert our attention today from an aspect of Gandhi's educational proposal which can be said to constitute its core. This was the idea of work as participative action. Gandhi believed in work as a means whereby human beings can realize not only their material requirements, but also their intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs. It is under conditions of social injustice and oppression that work becomes drudgery and a crude weapon directed against all that makes people human. Basic Education defined work in its broadest sense so as to make it a medium of socializing the child into a participative culture. Individual autonomy and consent to participate in group responsibility were essential to this socializing agenda.

In this emphasis on participative action, Basic Education was consistent with modern pedagogical theory which suggests that children's accomplishment in learning new skills and knowledge depends on their consent to learn, to value the teacher's effort and to work in groups. Two eminent contemporaries of Gandhi, Tagore and Gijubhai, devoted themselves to building institutional models where teaching with the child's consent and participation would be the norm.

Our present system of education fails so often to achieve its aims because the institutional atmosphere, the curriculum, class size, and the methods of teaching ignore the role of the child in education. An erroneous belief commonly reflected in statements of intent is that teachers must *make* the child active. Such statements reveal our neglect, or rather ignorance, of the child's nature which is to be active. All that schools need to do is to ensure that the child's natural desire to be active is not curbed; rather, that this desire is given the opportunity and the means of enhancement through convivial action.

The idea that schools should provide children with the opportunity and the means to undertake skilled manual work was obviously to establish in the minds of children the dignity of work, and not just the intellectual work traditionally provided by schools. But manual work, especially in the context of routine tasks related to school upkeep was also designed to inculcate initiative in place of indifference and reluctance to taking personal responsibility. Gandhi's life, and not just his educational proposal, shows that his ultimate mission was to awaken in a colonized people the courage to have faith in choice and initiative. Once he had succeeded in arousing this faith in the context of colonial rule, Gandhi extended the scope of choice to include in it a change in the culturally defined antipathy towards manual work, especially when it meant cleaning.

Gandhi's message is a refusal to cope with the given situation. It forms the first step towards taking personal responsibility for one's work. Translated in terms of pedagogical theory, it would mean habituating children to feel responsible out of a personal urge rather than out of the need to comply with someone's orders. Institutional ethos is the primary means of creating such a habit, but the curriculum must highlight this goal as a formal objective ranking higher than literacy or numeracy.

Giving Gandhi's 'new education' a second hearing today would require that we look at autonomy and initiative from the teacher's perspective as well. It can hardly be imagined that teachers who are themselves not used to exercising autonomy can encourage children to be autonomous. The ability to take independent decisions, and the desire to take personal responsibility must figure as major objectives of teacher training. This, however, cannot be sufficient to ensure that training in such objectives will be actually put into practice. The physical conditions under which elementary teachers work, the rule-structures that govern their career and the culture of the offices to which teachers are obliged to go in

order to fulfil administrative routines—all of these constitute an important part of the legacy of colonial rule against which Gandhi had struggled.

The official routines and rules that govern lives and careers of teachers to this day almost prohibit independent thinking and ingenuity. Even in purely academic matters like shaping the curriculum and selecting pedagogical material, obsolete procedures and expectations continue to hold sway even as new ideas are mouthed as being preferable. Young teachers often get a shock when they discover that an initiative taken by them was not welcomed. During the '50s when Basic Education was widely practised, inspectorial norms and procedures were found to be faulty and problematic for pedagogical change. Teachers who attempted to switch from textbook-based instruction to organizing activities were often criticized for being over-enthusiastic. Even today, inspectorial expectations are tied to the old, syllabus-covering approach. More than teachers, it is often the monitoring officials who fail to realize that the two kinds of approaches are entirely different and cannot be evaluated on similar criteria.

While we prepare ourselves to rediscover Gandhi's legacy and define it for our times, we can greatly benefit ourselves by drawing a few lessons from the past experience of Basic Education. The abandoning of Basic Education in the early '60s in many parts of the country for its alleged failure need not be treated as a permanent stigma. The destiny of educational ideas, as indeed of all ideas, is shaped by historical circumstances. It would be foolish to disqualify an idea for a fresh trial just because the shape it took at a certain point in history proved unsatisfactory. In any case, the judgement that Basic Education failed in the first round is problematic. Many Basic Education institutions carried out excellent programmes in the hey-day of Gandhi's idea, and some continue their battle against all possible odds to this day. In Gujarat, Basic Education is still a part of the official policy, and at Siksha

Niketan in Burdwan district of West Bengal, a Basic school was started as recently as 1987 in the memory of Acharya Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay. In the context of teacher training, the programmes offered at Gandhi Vidyapith at Vedchchi and Lok Bharati at Sanosara mark a considerable departure from the usual training available elsewhere in the country.

It is apparently as a 'national' system that Basic Education failed to live up to the expectations created by it in the '40s and the '50s. Such a feeling should inspire us to examine the nature of the expectations and the nature of the efforts that were made to fulfil them. The prime expectation was that Basic Education would bring about social transformation. For this kind of vast, rather amorphous hope to be fulfilled, one key condition would be a *supportive socio-economic and political climate*. A sustained trial for a long period is another major condition we can imagine. All evidence points to the fact that Basic Education had to face a hostile socio-economic climate, and that the quality of political support it received varied from region to region. Indeed, the main reason why Basic Education could not be sustained for more than a decade or so after Independence was the ambivalence of political patronage.

Political patronage apart, even popular appreciation of Basic Education was far from adequate. A rather limited attempt was made to create popular interest in the idea, especially to counter common misunderstandings about it which many parents evidently entertained. Perhaps it was assumed that the idea was simple, so it would be easily understood and appreciated. It also appears that concerted opposition to it was never expected. Some of those who supported Basic Education as a policy tried to defend it when it was attacked, others responded merely by staying quietly committed to their daily work. It is hard to find a case where the critics of Basic Education were asked to name some other alternative to the traditional system of children's education.

For a revival of Gandhi's concept of education as a guide to general reform today, the lesson is obvious. Attention must be given to the creation of a receptive socio-political climate. A second lesson we might learn from the past concerns flexibility and diversity of approaches. Looking back at the '50s, one finds that an orthodox interpretation of Gandhi's proposal was common. It was reflected in the uniformity of curricular choices, training procedures, and administrative arrangements. This was obviously a major contradiction, considering that Gandhi was among the strongest critics of the uniformity that colonial rule had imposed on schools in India. In this matter, Basic Education became a victim of the bureaucratic culture entrenched in the education system.

In a revived Basic Education programme, local and regional *diversity of approaches* must be encouraged as a matter of principle, not just tolerated. But diversity cannot be triggered by pressing a button, especially when it has been discouraged for so long and when the bias against it is so deep-rooted in policy and planning. Indeed, the capacity to evolve a local style has atrophied among teachers due to long disuse. And the capacity we are talking about is not an outcome of training alone; it also depends on mental attributes such as the desire to experiment, and culturally transmitted attributes such as self-reliance and acceptance of risk. A diversity of approaches will have to be encouraged in a sustained manner for it to become a part of the system. One step towards such encouragement would be to create a climate featuring appreciation of diversity.

The works of three eminent Indian philosophers can provide us with great help in creating a positive social ethos for a policy which might guarantee teachers' freedom to organize the daily curriculum differently around common themes. These philosophers are Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and J. Krishnamurti. Their writings on education, not easily accessible today, need to be widely disseminated as part of the initiative to

promote a variety of approaches in a revived Basic Education programme.

Lack of diversity was reflected most sharply in the choice of agriculture and gardening as 'crafts' to be taught at school. This choice was apparently based on the requirement we have discussed earlier, namely that Basic schools should strive towards financial self-sufficiency. The fact that agricultural or gardening activity would generate usable produce and possibly cash, perhaps clouded the recognition that this kind of manual activity could hardly be called a handicraft.

The training for precision and accuracy required by traditional handicrafts cannot be easily associated with the manual work involved in agriculture and gardening. In fact, the excessive emphasis given to agricultural production at some basic education institutions led to complaints of children being used as labourers, lending further weight to the already prevalent prejudice against Basic schools. The joy of learning a handicraft and the refinement of senses that it can be expected to bring about in childhood cannot be conveniently associated with production-oriented agricultural work.

A crippling blow was suffered by the post-Independence programme of Basic Education when the schools practising it were denied recognition for higher studies and examinations in certain parts of the country. This structural discord significantly curtailed the options available to children studying in Basic schools. The denial of recognition to their work was based on the argument that they had not studied the syllabus and textbooks prescribed in the other schools. The attempt made in Basic schools to displace the prescribed textbook from its dominant position in Indian school life proved the single most problematic aspect of Basic Education as far as its image in state offices of education was concerned. Teachers of Basic schools were trained to develop their own daily curriculum of activities and their own material. They were supposed to avoid using the textbook in the early grades, and keep it to the minimum in later grades. In this

practice they were following Gandhi's articulate distaste for textbook-centred instruction, which was clearly a part of his general rejection of colonial education Gandhi had written,

If textbooks are treated as a vehicle for education, the living world of the teacher has very little value. A teacher who teaches from textbooks does not impart originality to his pupils. He himself becomes a slave of textbooks and has no opportunity or occasion to be original. It therefore seems that the less textbooks there are the better it is for the teacher and his pupils.⁴

But teaching without textbooks made the inspectorial bureaucracy feel uncomfortable, and that was one reason why Basic schools had so much trouble gaining accreditation at par with other schools.

Even today, when voluntary agencies engaged in innovative work attempt to replace the prescribed textbook with other material, they have to face the difficult task of convincing the bureaucracy that the work they are doing is as serious as the work normal schools are doing with textbooks. Apparently, the colonial practice of prescribing textbooks continues to fulfil some deep psychological function in the system of education and in the society it serves. Even parents get apprehensive about the quality of instruction when it is not squarely based on the prescribed text. Understandably, parents belonging to economically weaker strata of society get particularly suspicious about such instruction because school textbooks are the only books in their houses. The textbook symbolizes authentic and approved knowledge, the ultimate proof of its indispensability being that the examination is based on it. The prescribed textbook, thus, forms the hub of a structure of relationships governing the system of education

The past experience of Basic Education provides us with an excellent guide to train and motivate the teacher to plan

his or her own daily curriculum and assemble appropriate material to execute the plan. The same past experience warns us that such laudable changes in teaching might create misconceptions among parents and officers if textbooks are demoted or dispensed with. We need to look at the textbook itself in our search for a solution to this problem. There is no theoretical reason why textbooks should demean the teacher's work, as Gandhi had found they were doing, or the child's natural urge to be active. If textbooks have such tragic consequences, the fault might lie to a great extent with the textbooks themselves and with the syllabus which they supposedly follow.

The report of the Yashpal committee, which was appointed by the Government of India three years ago to examine the widespread problem of curricular burden on children, found Indian textbooks to be greatly deficient in terms of the capacity to arouse children's interest and involvement in learning.⁵ As this report suggests, our textbooks seldom require children to observe the world around them or to engage in purposive activity. Some textbooks do list classroom activities in a routine manner. Often, these activities are of the kind that cannot be organized in an ordinary classroom. And what children might learn from these activities is stated anyhow

On the score of arousing interest, modern textbooks often fare worse than the textbooks written in Gandhi's day. But all such deficiencies can be overcome if textbooks are written with greater care and with the active participation of teachers. The training given to teachers in the old programme of Basic Education to prepare classroom material can be incorporated in future into an enhanced, more general preparation for participation in textbook writing.

A fresh initiative using Gandhi's educational thought must break new ground in conceptualizing relevant knowledge for today's children. It should

also mark an improvement on past experience of Basic Education in areas where it revealed structural and practical problems. The psychological insights into childhood that are available to us now should also be reflected in the new programme. The following core areas might form an attractive curricular design for a revived Basic Education programme.

Core area I	Core area II	Core area III	Core area IV
Health and hygiene	Heritage craft (e.g. weaving, toycraft, clay work or any other handicraft)	Expressive arts	Mathematics
Nature study		Reading Writing	Sorting and representation of quantitative information
Social study			

The four core areas named above can be expected to provide for opportunities to extend children's experiential base and knowledge as they advance from grade one to five. These core areas can also supply a basis for further classification of knowledge in the remaining grades of elementary education, namely grades six to eight

Two aspects of this curricular design that deserve some elaboration are nature study and heritage crafts. In the present elementary-level science curriculum, nature study has the latent purpose of imparting a sense of conquest or control over nature. Such an idea is quite contrary to Gandhi's vision of a world where human beings and nature might co-exist. It also clashes with the widely accepted current knowledge of ecological balance and sustainability, for example in the context of disease-control with the help of poisons. The contradictions involved in such strategies are noticed by children long before they are acknowledged, that too reluctantly, in the school. The confusion and cynicism that this delayed acknowledgement causes can be avoided if school pedagogy provides for nature study in the context of a holistic vision of life and health.

The inclusion of heritage crafts in the elementary school curriculum can be expected to make a unique contribution which would combine several different

4 M K Gandhi, 'Text Books', *Harijan*, 9 December 1939

5 *Learning Without Burden* (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi, 1993)

educational aims. These would include the imparting of manual skill and dexterity, aesthetic sense, and the development of certain aspects of personality which the traditional school curriculum and culture routinely fails to develop. These aspects relate to self-esteem arising from a sense of worth and confidence in one's competence. Teaching of heritage crafts in childhood can stem the large-scale de-skilling of young people that is taking place as a result of poorly conceived modernisation. In association with the expressive arts (such as music, drawing and painting), handicrafts can provide that much-needed training of the senses on which alone the development of meaningful literacy skills can take place.

Specific activities and topics of study that would fill up these core areas ought to be identified at regional and local levels. For this exercise, the following ideas can perhaps be treated as guiding principles derived from Gandhi's legacy and child psychology:

- * The child's immediate milieu is treated as a resource for itemizing required knowledge and skills (for example, local birds, flowers, crops and trees; local language and folklore; and locally practiced crafts and expressive arts).

- * All topics are taught with the help of activities. These activities may be the ones suggested in a curriculum guideline or they may be new ones, devised by the teacher.

- * Children are trained to work in small groups.

- * Classroom activities aim at extending the child's life at home.

- * Some activities provide for opportunities requiring children to work outside the classroom every day.

- * A few topics are selected for deeper probing which might take several days, taking the shape of a project.

- * Children are given opportunities to work independently of the teacher.

The acceptance of these guiding principles will demand a major initiative towards changing present-day teacher training. In planning such an initiative, we can realistically hope to find useful ideas

in the literature documenting the Basic Education programmes of the '50s and in the ongoing training programmes of certain Gandhian institutions.

One organizational change which might greatly assist in realizing a key goal of Basic Education would be to amalgamate community-level health services with the local elementary school. It is a common experience that village-level health workers have closer ties with the community than the school teacher. The situation does, of course, vary according to region, but in general the health worker seems to have more personal acquaintance with parents and children than the teacher has. The health worker is also usually better equipped than the teacher to look after children's health-related problems and to advise them on such problems. Incorporating the health worker's services to the school will enhance the school's capacity to work for children's welfare. The isolated and meagre instruction which the school provides at present seldom succeeds in making health and hygiene prime concerns of practical knowledge for the growing child.

A similar step needs to be taken in the context of the services currently provided under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programmes for early childhood care and pre-school education. It is ironical that the services made available under this programme in thousands of villages remain isolated from school even though the services are aimed at making children's transition to school smoother. Separating these services from the school has exacerbated the confusion in the community's mind over the nature and function of different institutions. Such confusion hardly helps in motivating the community to participate in the running of these institutions. A truly integrated set of child-related programmes will surely have a better chance of success in inspiring people to take active interest in these programmes and to feel responsible towards them. Such integration will be compatible with the holistic vision of community welfare embedded in the idea of Basic Education.

Finally, a new programme of Basic Education must address the task of creating conditions in which the teacher can establish contact with the community and the family. Planners of Basic Education in the '50s had, for this purpose, chalked out school designs that would include housing for teachers.⁶ We need to revisit the homework done at that time, for the problem it attempted to deal with still afflicts the system of elementary education. In fact, it has become more acute. The daily commuting by hundreds of thousands of elementary school teachers every day to their village school and back on public transport represents a tragic waste of their energy and modest personal resources. It also represents a major loss for the children and the community which the teacher is supposed to serve.

By enabling teachers to become a part of the spatial community we can hope to enhance their involvement in children's out-of-school life. The goal of a Gandhian plan of educational reconstruction can only be to make teachers responsible for the overall development of the children they work with. Progress in this direction will depend on the extent to which bureaucratic control over schools and teachers is replaced by a system of accountability, jointly managed by teachers and the community. The degradation suffered by elementary-level teachers at the hands of officials is the single most relevant reason why teachers greet every reform with cynicism and resignation. This attitude cannot be countered without making alterations in entrenched styles of financial and administrative control. Decision-making and power are involved in each micro-detail or routine functioning of the system. These micro-details can be visualised as so many screws of a giant colonial machinery. The best of ideas aimed at winning the teacher's heart and the community's support get crushed under these screws. A new programme of Basic Education can hardly be expected to work if these screws remain intact.

⁶ Report on Primary-Junior Basic Schools (National Buildings Organisation, Ministry of Works and Housing, New Delhi, undated)

Elementary truths

POONAM BATRA

AN ELEMENTARY school. Class II in progress. A lesson about birds—large and small, blue and black, with long beaks and ... A child staring out of the window looking at the sky: 'I also want to fly like an eagle. I will tell Sohail to fly me like he flies kites! But how? Why? What?'

'Sumit will you stop looking out and pay attention to what I am teaching!'

Snap, away flies a dream.

'Teacher, why can't I fly?'

'Because you don't have wings.'

'But I can fly like a kite, can't I?'

'Now read this chapter and stop asking silly questions.'

Such an interaction is not uncommon in a primary classroom in India. How often we shatter children's dreams, their curiosities and creative spirit.

It was with an urge to address these problems that we started to think of realizing our dream: an alternate vision of children's education. So much has been said and so little done since Indepen-

dence — so many institutions created only to crumble. We knew that the real challenge lies in making this dream real. So, we set forth in 1991 to create a new academic programme for elementary school teachers: the B.El.Ed. Many joined us in this venture: school teachers, university professors, students and even children.

Periods of excitement and hope were interspersed with despair, a feeling of being continually pulled back by vested interests. But as a member of the core team said, 'Good ideas never die. It will take form when the time is right.'

The B.El.Ed. programme is now in its second academic year. A lot has been achieved, but much more remains.

After many initiatives and false starts since Independence, the yawning gap in elementary education was rediscovered in the mid-1980s. The current National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986/92) emphasizes universal enrolment and universal retention of children up to 14

and a substantial improvement in the quality of education.

The efforts made by the state in making elementary education accessible in quantitative terms are laudable, given the fact that we have the largest population of illiterates on the planet. The thrust however, on providing quality elementary education still remains to take shape. The state has applied itself to the provision of infrastructural facilities: buildings and blackboards where none exist and teachers where school staff is inadequate. There has even been a firm political commitment to increase the investment in education to 6% of the GDP.

The NPE, however, does recognize the weakest link in this chain, the inadequacy of teacher training itself. It makes the firm commitment by declaring that 'as the first step, the system of teacher education will be overhauled'. The Programme of Action identifies three areas in which the role of the teacher requires training support: academic inputs, psychological inputs and research and development.

At present, elementary education is the best case of an obvious mismatch between the demands of school teaching and the skills imparted to trainees through programmes like the Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.) and numerous private courses designed to meet the requirements of secondary and vocational education. Consequently, elementary school teachers are either unqualified or unmotivated and unprepared in the pedagogy of teaching young children.

In the absence of a quality elementary teacher education programme at the national level, the 'general purpose B.Ed.' continues to be sought after as the legitimate degree of teacher education. Why is it that, despite achieving a B.Ed. degree, most elementary teachers are ill-equipped to make a qualitative difference in their classrooms? Is it mainly because the B.Ed. does not train teachers in the pedagogy of teaching elementary school children?

Another disturbing trend is the uncontrolled privatization of elementary

education because neither the state nor the university system can cater to this. Teacher training courses in elementary education are responding to two major demands: private institutes along the Junior Basic Training (JBT), Nursery Teacher Training (NTT) model and District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) in response to government programmes. Since the current demand is not being met, B.Ed. courses through correspondence have flourished to fill the gap.

The current B.Ed. programme (offered at Delhi University and other institutes) focuses on secondary school teaching and uses a subject-based focus in training teachers. For example, the course offered at the Central Institute of Education (Department of Education, Delhi University), a premier institution of education in the country, follows an appropriate though conventional approach to train secondary and higher secondary school teachers. It has little to offer in terms of developing perspectives of elementary school children and understanding of the dynamic realities of an elementary classroom in order to evolve appropriate pedagogical perspectives and techniques.

Moreover, none of these programmes share the perspective that they are training teachers and teacher educators whose students will enter the 'university of life' somewhere between 2010 and 2020. Given current rates of change not only in science and technology but social structure, media and modes of interpersonal transaction, the world is moving towards a very different way of life. We are currently training teachers based on a model that has changed little since the 1950s. It is no wonder that countries like South Korea, Taiwan, China and even Pakistan are ahead of us on the HDI.

Over the past decade and a half several major initiatives have been launched to innovate within the common elementary school system. The Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (APEP), the Uttar Pradesh Primary Education Project (UPEP), the Bihar Education Project (BEP) and Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan are cases in point. There has

been a tremendous inflow of international funds for these macro level ventures. At another level, the mass campaign approaches such as 'Jathas' have received active support from the state.

The Jathas claim to have achieved considerable success at mass mobilization of communities in the country. Whether these macro-level initiatives have made a difference to the quality of school education still remains to be assessed. Moreover, even if many of these programmes are better informed about appropriate methods of learning in schools, they have rarely culminated in improved professional methods of teacher training. All efforts at teacher development are confined to the 'in-service' model.

At a micro-level too, there has been significant innovation in elementary education by various groups in the country. Several of them have even been successful at transforming the process in primary classrooms, making learning meaningful and relevant for children. Some of these ideas have given shape to innovative teacher training methods as well. However, attempts like David Hosbrough's Neel Bagh have remained islands of excellence. The Eklavya principle of child-centred primary education, for instance, have not been taken up beyond the rhetoric of policy statement; systematic efforts have not been made to integrate these into the state system.

The DIETs are considered a systematic response from within the system, to fulfil the objective of 'overhauling' elementary teacher education. While the creation of DIETs is a laudable effort at providing more systematic pre-service training for elementary school teachers, most of its faculty is trained in secondary school teaching. With a flood of workshops on issues of elementary education such as the MLL, child-centred education, most such teacher educators have come to mouth the discourse of qualitative elementary school education, with little professional skill at dealing with these issues in the classroom.

This trend of 'speaking' the 'right' discourse has widened the gap between

a sound professional understanding of issues in primary education and a torturous attempt at translating it into practice. Consequently, while teacher educators who are well-versed with the discourse of a new policy perspective in elementary education, say the 'right' things, their lack of a sound understanding of classroom and child development and learning principles leaves much to be desired.

A primary school teacher enters employment as an Assistant Teacher (AT) in the government school system. She continues in the AT scale for 12 years, after which she is given a higher scale equivalent to the Trained Graduate Teacher (TGT) scale. A hierarchy operates even within the primary school grades where a teacher is seen as 'promoted' when given Classes III and IV to teach after having earlier taught Classes I and II. She continues to draw the AT scale over these 12 years that she teaches at the primary level, even if she has acquired a B.Ed. degree. This low salary accords a low status to elementary school teachers and hence to elementary education. This, in turn, reflects in the poor quality of primary education and the loss of the crucial formative years of development of those millions of our children who manage to attend school.

For most parents, teachers and even teacher educators, teaching young children (primary and pre-primary) is seen to require no specific training. At best, the consciousness of the ability to nurture, to be patient and to be a good role model is seen to be necessary. Most elementary school teachers fail to see that the teaching of primary school children is a pedagogic process, distinct from that of teaching older children. Hence, the requirement for rigorous professional input into teaching young children has never been perceived or recognized. For this and other reasons, primary school teaching remains a convenient vocation for most women, especially housewives. If India is to become a truly 'literate' society and a world leader in a holistic sense, it is imperative that this gap be closed rapidly.

A professional approach to elementary school teaching in developed countries derives from a commitment and involvement of the universities in primary education. In Sweden and Japan, for instance, elementary school teachers have been professors in universities and vice versa. Selected elementary school teachers in Japan are paid salaries equivalent to professors.

It is precisely to aid the transformation and professionalization of elementary education that the Maulana Azad Centre for Elementary and Social Education (MACESE) was established in the University of Delhi in 1991, funded by the Planning Commission. The mandate of this inter-disciplinary centre is to professionalize education. A necessary first step is to create a bridge between university research and elementary school education. The idea of a professional degree programme of Elementary Teacher Education was first mooted by MACESE and subsequently stated in its Perspective Paper (December 1991).

The B.El.Ed. programme is a four-year integrated professional degree programme of Elementary Teacher Education offered after +2. This programme is designed to include an integrated study of subject knowledge, human development, pedagogy and communication skills. The main thrust of the programme is on understanding children and communicating effectively with them, with the goal of ensuring effective learning.

The B.El.Ed. marks a major departure from the existing teacher training programmes that have proliferated in the country. With this pioneering effort, Delhi University has paved the way to link elementary school education with quality academic research and the professional development of school teachers. The programme addresses several issues that have been unheard of in traditional teacher training programmes, including pedagogy of teaching children as well as teacher education; the psychological development of the teacher and attitude building; reconstructing elementary school teachers' knowledge base and

perspectives; non-cognitive domains of child-focused education and a sustainable teacher functioning in a bilingual classroom situation.

Theory courses spread over four years are so designed that students get to discover knowledge through field-based work and practice. The programme has an extensive practicum content, and gives equal weightage to theory and practice. Each of the theory courses are designed to promote an inter-disciplinary perspective and questioning attitude. This undergraduate programme that awards a professional degree opens up academic options at post-graduate level and further research in elementary education. The B.El.Ed. is thus designed to develop the discipline of elementary education by training both qualified elementary school teachers and teacher educators.

This process of achieving the establishment of a professional elementary teacher education programme at Delhi University was a four year roller-coaster ride, alternating between excitement, hope and despair.

A tentative proposal outlining the rationale and specific objectives of a professional teacher training course was discussed among an invited body of academics from different departments of the university in 1991. The initial response was supportive. Later, a dialogue was initiated through a series of workshops and seminars, drawing in academics and activists in education from other institutes.

Academics and administrators alike, recognized the cause as an important first step towards professionalizing elementary education. The programme, in their view, would open further academic and career options to teachers drawing higher quality students into the field. Undergraduate teachers from over ten undergraduate colleges in Delhi University expressed an overwhelming desire to associate themselves with the design of courses of the B.El.Ed. curriculum. Over a hundred academics from different institutions, universities and colleges participated in this exercise from 1991 to 1994.

Many of the ideas integrated in the B.El.Ed. curriculum were gathered from a series of group discussions and workshops with this group of committed professors. Other ideas were generated through discussions with elementary school teachers, students pursuing diploma courses in DIETs, student of NTT, and trainees of the B Ed. programme.

A curriculum framework thus evolved, was deliberated upon by a group of senior academics gripped by a feeling of complete involvement – the entire process was a dream come true. As old and new ideas were discussed, it became apparent that what we were really trying to do was to put into operation a new vision of teacher education. It was not a mere battle against the 'old' but the unfolding of a process that would give shape to a myriad of ideas about children and their education, expressed by several noted educationists and 'child-lovers' across the world.

There was no stopping after that. Several noted academics took the initiative to give shape to the courses that were proposed in the curriculum. Committees were set up to deliberate upon each course and have them vetted before according final approval. It was an opportunity that unleashed the creative spirit in each person involved – school and college teachers and university professors alike. The course designers knew that the B.El.Ed. was an important historic step in furthering the cause of elementary school education in the country. No specific guidelines were given to course designers. And yet, we all shared a common concern and perspective – of providing quality education to the children of our country and a perspective of enabling a process of change and not merely producing a finished product.

It took four long years and many small and large battles before the B.El.Ed. courses could be approved by the Delhi University's Academic Council in July 1994. The programme was then initiated in one undergraduate college in September 1994 – with a batch of 35 students. In the first year the ratio of applicants to

those selected was 1:15 compared to 1:10 for the B Ed, while in the second year, the ratio is 1:20.

The idea of a professional degree programme in elementary teacher education met with much resistance from several quarters in the Department of Education and Delhi University. To begin with, teacher educators within the establishment were apprehensive of the direct competition for jobs that B Ed students could face from B.El.Ed. They thus favoured an elective specialization in elementary education within the B Ed course. Another source of threat was perhaps the vision of the B.El.Ed. programme which was a major departure from traditional practices of training school teachers.

This new vision of education strives to draw out and chisel the potential of children rather than make them passive recipients of 'knowledge'. This is not possible without prospective teachers going through such a process of education themselves. The real challenge lies in the design and in giving concrete shape to such an integrated curriculum.

University administrators had two major arguments against such a teacher education programme: one, should institutes of higher education enter into the realm of elementary education; and two, why should undergraduate colleges be the site of a professional programme of teacher education?

A creative response to this was to undertake a study to examine the feasibility of such a programme. This feasibility study, addressed the need, scope and nature of a professional education programme for elementary school teachers in Delhi. It also examined the viability of yet another education programme, given the existence of DIETs that were set up to train elementary school teachers.

The study revealed that elementary school teaching in Delhi is not seen as a professional option, but rather as a means to complement household incomes in a 'socially acceptable' vocation by female teachers or as a 'last-choice' option for unemployed male graduates.

School administrators in particular, emphasized the need for trained elementary school teachers. They felt that MACTSE could set the pace for the professionalization of elementary school education. This would offer both academic and professional options to students that would ensure both the qualitative growth of elementary education and the school teacher. This, in turn, would help create professionally qualified elementary teacher educators and a social base to influence teacher training through DIETs.

This was also seen as a creative solution by members of the Planning Commission, whose major concern was achieving training targets for elementary school teachers. Creating teacher educators rather than mere elementary school teachers was seen as an essential step towards addressing the problem of large numbers, an inescapable Indian reality. It must be reiterated here that through such a trajectory a professional education programme can contribute far more effectively in achieving universalization of elementary education than ad hoc mobilisational measures. This is mainly because the question of quality in elementary schooling has never been adequately addressed, either by teacher educators associated with the B Ed or by the popular Jatha approach in literacy.

An understanding of the process by which pedagogic inputs specific to elementary school teaching can build teacher skills is conspicuously absent even among existing teacher educators. For most, subject knowledge is the crucial skill and aptitude. This is reflected in the dominant hierarchy within school education that sees subject-based teaching of a higher status than, for instance, the 'topic learning' approach.

The numerous private courses that offer a B.Ed., in fact, flourish because the given conventional model is so easily replicable. Within the behaviourist framework, the traditional teacher training approach lays specific emphasis on learning outcomes. Each student teacher is expected to plan her lessons within the confines of subject knowledge.

The emphasis in such a model lies on viewing knowledge as a compendium of static information rather than a continuous evolving and dynamic process of discovery. Good teaching within the model is possible when the teacher has a sound subject knowledge and the skill to plan the delivery of this information through effective classroom transaction. The teacher, for example, is only equipped to teach classes XI and XII if she has a masters-degree in the given subject. The education 'caste' system ensures that graduates are only allowed to teach classes up to X. A professional B Ed programme of a year's duration further equips her to develop pedagogical skills in the chosen subject.

While most teacher training has been largely based on this model, little thought has been given to pedagogical issues other than those related to the methodology of teaching a specific subject. These include evolving teaching techniques that are in consonance with the developmental levels and needs of children, that address individual differences in children, and that view the classroom situation as a dynamic and continually evolving process.

While conventional teacher training programmes like the B.Ed. impart basic skills in the methodology of teaching specific subjects, the B.El.Ed. attempts to develop in the prospective teacher an understanding of children and skills to effectively communicate with them. The theory and practicum courses create opportunities for teachers to evolve a pedagogy of educating children in an integrated manner.

The programme is designed in a manner that urges the student to look for connections between conceptual knowledge and classroom realities. The courses seek to facilitate integration at various levels in the learner's mind. For instance, students are encouraged to work on assignments using a variety of methods such as interviews with selected people/children, conducting tasks with children and observations, apart from library reference. Every theory course has such in-built units of field assignments.

A back and forth movement between theory and practice provides the student with the opportunity to relate to the subject matter and internalise its applications. Courses in child development, for instance, are taught alongside a practicum of school contact. While organizing creative activities with children in schools, students are challenged to contend with issues such as making themselves understood to children, relating to children given the socio-economic realities of their lives and maintaining discipline while giving space for creative expression. This is followed by systematic observations of children in naturalistic settings in the following year. Practicum such as these go towards developing positive attitudes towards children before they start developing pedagogical perspectives and techniques. A major thrust of pedagogic skills is to develop in them the capacity to continually evolve teaching-learning techniques in the context of children's developmental levels and needs.

An important feature that distinguishes the B.El.Ed. from conventional courses is the high level of contact time with children and schools. The programme has an extensive practicum content (about 50%) that is designed to give students skills and experiences of working with children in different contexts through play, theatre and craft, observation and pedagogic reflection.

Understanding children and childhood within inter-disciplinary theoretical perspectives along with the practical experience of working with children aims to draw out new perspectives from students. The course content and field assignments are aimed at enabling students to take children seriously, to value them and to keep alive in them their natural curiosity and creative spirit. Over the four year programme, special emphasis is laid on reflecting on adult-child gaps and in developing positive attitudes towards children and their ability to learn.

Eminent Indian educationists, such as Gandhi, Tagore, Aurobindo and Gijubhai have emphasized the child's

need for an atmosphere of independence and self-reliance. A teacher can create such an atmosphere only when teachers as learners are facilitated to become self-directing, are able to choose and bear the responsibility of the consequences of their choice, and are able to learn more and do so more enthusiastically. The way we construct reality is central to the way we perceive ourselves. The 'self' thus becomes a crucial 'determiner' of our perceptions about others, our relationships and attitudes. B.El.Ed. courses have been especially designed to address issues of the self, inter-personal skills and communication, within existing theoretical frameworks. Self-development workshops in particular aim to foster this process of self-reflection and personal growth.

Besides this, inputs of theatre and craft also play a significant role in enabling this process. The concept of co-curricular activities does not exist in the B.El.Ed. programme. Education of the child and the teacher alike is the process of unfolding inner potential. This process of developing awareness and building attitudes is central to course activities that come under the general heading of 'experiential learning'. While the traditional classroom process seems designed to 'disempower' the student, the person-centered approach attempted in the B.El.Ed. allows students to be directly involved in decision-making.

Carl Rogers had made a powerful argument for a move away from an emphasis on 'teaching' to one on 'learning'. Historically, the power in teacher training has always been in the hands of educators largely concerned with content and not in the process of teaching-learning. This is probably due to the continuing emphasis on teaching fixed bodies of knowledge using a formal approach. The information revolution, explosion of media and rapid globalization is making most of these concepts redundant. Even in 'discovery learning', the bulk of the practice has involved the teaching of 'subjects' to meet the requirement of formal examinations.

Democracy and its values which are supposed to be central to our social and political process are ignored, even scorned in practice in elementary schools. In real political practices, the school stands in stark contrast to what is taught. While being taught that freedom and responsibility are the glorious features of our democracy, students find themselves powerless, having little freedom, and with no opportunity to exercise choice or carry responsibility. Likewise, a major contradiction has always existed between the values being formally taught and those that children in reality imbibe through a 'hidden curriculum'.

By de-emphasizing the lecture mode of curriculum transaction, the B.El.Ed. makes a major departure from the traditional practice and promotes self-learning through a more open, non-threatening classroom environment. Most foundation and core theory courses of the programme are inter-disciplinary. A study of the methods used in social science or a science project on environment and development provides considerable opportunities for students to experience the integration between disciplines while dealing with real issues in the classroom.

Our experience is that a prospective elementary school teacher gains much more by studying relevant issues in contemporary India such as the constitutional provisions, economic, political and sociological realities of children and society at large than a dry course in civics. The emphasis of such courses is to expose students to topical and meaningful issues rather than mere bookish knowledge. Drawing upon knowledge gained in school, the core courses specifically aim at a reconstruction of knowledge and developing new perspectives. These courses also serve as inputs into the pedagogic issues.

B.El.Ed. students will be the first student teachers in the country trained by a model whereby practical experience with young children is followed by theory and then by School Internship. Unlike traditional teacher trainees, they will have the opportunity to develop curriculum

material, pedagogic techniques and evaluation techniques and to innovate. The programme fosters the continuing process of learning, thus enabling students to learn 'how to learn'. The School Internship Model would be a culmination of perspectives gained about children and education, pedagogy and communication.

Another unique feature of this professional programme is the bilingual nature of the classroom. It is for the first time in the history of teacher training that both Hindi and English medium students share a common academic floor. In my opinion, this is one of the most valuable experiences of empowerment observed by the faculty that directs the programme. At one level, students feel 'empowered' having gained a sense of self-confidence given the recognition of their 'mother-tongue'. At another, access to a wide body of national and international material in English is accessible to them through the oral mode, made possible through paper presentations and workshops.

The experience of initiating the B.El.Ed. even in an established undergraduate college of Delhi University has not been easy. Much needs to be done to stabilize and sustain the professional character of the programme. There is a pressing need to develop good pedagogical materials which would enable us to translate the B.El.Ed. syllabus into a real curriculum. Further, such materials need to be developed in Hindi. Attempts are already underway to create good text materials for each course to protect the programme from becoming person-dependent.

It is also important that procedures of practicum and norms of evaluation and assessment be systematized and standardized. Setting norms of quality is especially significant in a university system, where traditional practices of evaluation through formal examinations have an undue power to stifle creativity and innovation.

Until such time as these structures take firm roots, there is danger of dilution of the process. It would, for example, be easy to conduct the practicum as a mechanical task of noting observations on

children's behaviour; writing reports that are unrelated to ground realities or without adequate connections with theory.

The professional development of the B.El.Ed. faculty is another major task. Whereas a clarity of ideas exists, the process of translating them into classroom practice is still evolving. An uncontrolled expansion of the B.El.Ed. programme to colleges with unprepared faculties can damage the entire process of evolving firmer and more sustainable structures and eventually, the cause of elementary education.

The recent approval accorded by Delhi University to a relatively new college (two years old) to start the B.El.Ed. programme reflects an insensitivity towards such issues and to the vision of this programme. It completely dismisses the interdisciplinary nature of the programme by according approval to a college that does not even have an essential academic faculty base in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, history, economics and political science which are major inputs in the B.El.Ed. courses. This is typical of the political compromises in the area of education (especially elementary education) and social development that have crippled the state of education in India.

The first B.El.Ed. graduates will enter elementary school teaching in the year 1998. Children taught by them will complete primary schooling by 2004. Perhaps it would be appropriate to conduct a systematic study to assess whether we have made a difference.

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Schools without schooling

MANABI MAJUMDAR

'Do you understand, gentlemen, that all the horror is in just this — that there is no horror!'

Yama, Alexander Kuprin

ON A recent field trip to a district of Rajasthan, I walked into a government-run village school on a working day and met the only teacher, out of a total of six, who was present on that day. He was about to begin the morning ritual of prayer on the school ground where about four hundred children had assembled, holding a stick in his hand (which, in his own hesitant admission, was needed occasionally to single-handedly discipline such a large number of students).

After the prayer, the student monitors of respective classes (this school has eight) were themselves filling in the attendance registers kept on the headmaster's table and quite enthusiastically carrying a few rickety chairs from the staff room to their classes, perhaps with an illusive hope that when chairs come can teachers be far behind! There was no supply of electricity in the school building that day and hence not a drop of water in the tap. So a few children got busy getting water from a nearby tubewell. The instantly available and visibly over-used buckets and the children's state of readiness to use

them imparted a strong feeling that fetching water from outside during school hours was for the students, a ritual no less frequent than attending morning prayers.

We have seen and known by now all these signs of virtually non-functioning village schools — single teacher schools, low teacher-pupil ratio, teacher absenteeism, the lack of adequate training and training facilities for teachers, lack of accountability in the school system, the abysmal quality of basic facilities and teaching materials and so on. But there is a tremendous lack of public attention to these stark indicators of the country's educational malaise. Our stated goals, rhetoric, policies and public discussions in general have reduced them to unnoticeable nothings. We have passed by these familiar trifles indifferently and never quite acknowledged that the reality of schooling system in many, though not all, Indian villages is downright terrible.

The problem is truly enormous in its significance and weight, yet it does not knock us like a blow. The horror, therefore, is that the "silent" emergencies fuelled by a defunct village school system are allowed to exist as everyday trivia, hardly creating any political controversy;

whereas 'loud' emergencies such as 'military threats' to national security (and the attendant demand for acquiring sophisticated weapons) always remain 'privileged' problems, receiving recurrent policy attention

Admittedly, many pious objectives have been periodically pronounced with regard to the expansion of educational opportunities in the country. But educational achievements, especially in the field of basic education, have hardly coincided with the stated intentions of policy makers. Why have the lofty ambitions so often been stymied? More importantly, what choices and alternatives do we have for the future? We attempt to address these issues in the sequel with a particular focus on political amnesia about the moribund schooling system in large parts of rural India, the so-called parental apathy to children's education and school systems in villages and the potential for institutionalizing local and parental participation in school management through Panchayati Raj (PR) institutions.¹

To be sure, the goal of providing free basic education to all children (up to fourteen years of age) has been repeatedly stated in sonorous phrases in official documents and public statements, but only with an ever-shifting time horizon for its actualization (by 1960 according to the Constitution, by 1995 according to the National Policy of Education [1986] and 'before we enter the twenty-first century', according to the revised policy [1992]). In effect, what is happening is the postponement of a compelling task each time the deadline approaches. These ever-receding goal posts disappointingly indicate that stated objectives have not been followed by bold, yet practical, measures required for providing education of *satisfactory quality* to all children, including those in rural India.

Expressed in a telegraphic manner, the underlying roots of basic education failure are the following. The provision

of schooling facilities, in rural India, has fallen far short of what is required to achieve universal elementary education. Public expenditure on education has remained low for a long time. Moreover, inter-sectoral allocation within the education system has been disproportionately favourable to higher education at the expense of basic education. Only recently, the share of elementary education in the education budget has started increasing, a large portion of which, however, is being used up for paying emoluments to teachers. Simultaneously, the growth of the number of teachers has slowed down considerably, causing a disturbing increase in pupil-teacher ratio (Dreze and Sen, 1995). Indeed, there is a substantial number of single-teacher schools in primary and middle levels. All these indicate the shocking neglect of the basic problems which have been allowed to corrode the basic framework of village school education for an embarrassingly long time.

Not surprisingly, ambitious goals, unaccompanied by adequate steps, have remained unrealisable. But more distressingly, rhetoric has obfuscated issues rather than making them clearer. That is to say, reiteration of lofty rhetoric has created a perception, in the public mind, that definitive public action is being taken to eradicate educational impoverishment. This manufactured impression of adequate governmental efforts has deflected our attention from the primary task of enlarging and sustaining satisfactory schooling facilities for children of the rural universe. Indeed, the problem of ill-equipped, under-staffed and unaccountable school establishments has been allowed to persist as an everyday 'non-issue' and thus vanish into political oblivion.

What, instead, has remained prominent in the public perception is the so-called lack of parental demand for their children's education in rural areas. Indeed it is often argued that the educationally deprived groups do not strongly react to their impairment and that it indicates a satisfaction with their current educational status. This line of

reasoning suggests that whether certain population groups will fail to benefit from the publicly provided educational services (no matter how inadequate) depends on their choice, driven in turn by what they aspire to achieve in their lives. But have the people in question indeed chosen their lives they lead? Clearly, we need to ensure certain necessary conditions that make people truly capable of choosing. What the demand-centred argument ignores is that left with acute poverty and other related impediments, many of the potential beneficiaries in rural India are simply incapable to attempt access to even 'free' education.

Hence, surely a part of the problem of low educational participation of rural children lies with inadequate parental interest in their educational well-being and more importantly with high opportunity cost of schooling. But the state's failure to generate demand for education through legislative means (through compulsory elementary education) has worked to reinforce and not weaken these other barriers to educational participation. More significantly, the apparent lack of demand for basic education among certain sections of rural population is itself a function, in part, of poor performance of primary and upper primary schools. Typical village schools, with deplorable infrastructural facilities and low standards of teaching, lack any attractive or retentive properties. Children soon lose interest in attending schools where one or two acting teachers, taking care of five to eight classes simultaneously, make them do many odd jobs and teach them at random some skills in literacy and numeracy.

Parents, who can afford to, send their children, especially boys, to study in private schools or to other villages with better schools. But the rest, left with the only choice of the government-run village school, passively accept the appalling state of affairs because they have limited ability to demand and monitor improved standard of schooling. They possess neither of the two standard options usually followed to cope with performance deterioration, namely, 'exit' (choice of an

¹ For an excellent discussion of many of these issues, see Dreze and Sen, 'Basic Education as a Political Issue', *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, Vol. IX, 1995.

alternative educational service – an economic response mechanism) and ‘voice’ (effective assertion of rights to better facilities – a political response mechanism). Both are costly to them in terms of money, time and effort

We often take it for given that difficult circumstances are the mother of protest and demand. But desires and opportunities may vary in opposite directions under conditions of hardship. That is to say when people are badly off their motivation to protest may be high but their opportunities to do so is the lowest. Given the elaborate and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures that need to be deployed, protesting against poor school facilities, teacher absenteeism, low teacher-pupil ratio and so on, requires the ability to take time off from directly productive activities. For example, they may be required to make several time-consuming and costly trips to the district education office. But this is exactly what vast sections of the rural population cannot afford. Simply put, there is an inverse relation between their educational needs and their social, economic and political opportunities

On the other hand, those who have the leisure and the ability to organize protest or other forms of collective action against deteriorating school performance may not have the inclination to do so. Because these segments of the public, with a strong voice and privileged access to information, get a disproportionate share of public educational services any way at the expense of weaker voices. This engenders a process of ‘dualism’ within the public school system itself, let alone between public and private schools. While well-staffed, well-equipped elite government schools prosper in cities and urban centres, rural children are mostly left in defunct government-run schools and are excluded from quality educational services. Thus, what exists is an implicit rationing system which sorts children into an array of schools that vary dramatically in quality across rural urban areas. The education gap that divides the country deepens through such a process of stream-

ing children into government schools which are socio-economically stratified

Admittedly, both central and state governments have had to grapple with the persistent problem of resource constraints. States with lower educational achievements are also those whose financial resources are particularly scarce. Notwithstanding this, efforts to expand basic education have varied enormously across the states of India. Correlatively, there has been varied performance record on their part in converting available resources into educational well-being. The quality of schooling, therefore, has not been uniformly deficient across the states. The fact that some states are extracting more educational miles per economic gallon strongly suggests that over and above financial requirements, we need a genuine political concern and efforts towards providing basic education of acceptable quality to all.

The main constraint on educational development is not essentially a financial one; that is, what matters is not just the aggregate resources but *how* those resources are spent. Stated more generally, the danger lies in the power of one set of interests which keeps the fundamental issue of improvement of the schooling system off the political agenda and by extension diverts finances away from the resource-poor areas of elementary education.

Surely, there exists a remarkable inter-state variation in terms of effective public pressure on the education policy agenda. An enlightened and politically conscious electorate in Kerala closely monitors the functioning of schools, including those in the rural areas. Here, cases of shirking on the part of teachers evoke strong collective protest (for example, many such cases are immediately publicized through posters in public places) and as a corollary elicit appropriate policy responses. It is by now well known that the building up of an accountable education system through the mechanism of public scrutiny has played a significant part in Kerala’s educational achievements.

On the other side of the ledger, endemic teacher absenteeism in the low literacy heartland (constituted of the educationally backward states of north India) has not created much political commotion for an alarmingly long stretch of time. This is indeed disturbing. But on a less dispiriting note, one can view school education in different parts of India as a series of educational systems—multiple identities within the same country with varying capabilities, policies, outputs and educational concerns. This further prompts us to probe what propitious institutional arrangements and political conditions are required as precondition for successful functioning of the public education system.

The recent strengthening of PR institutions offers new opportunities for institutionalizing community and parental participation in village school management. In principle, PR institutions can play an important role in recognizing local aspirations, conditions and needs and for on-the-spot monitoring and control. At a more basic level, these decentralization measures may facilitate empowerment of disadvantaged groups who have an interest in an improved schooling system but thus far lacked any feasible means of taking action. Clearly, the politics of basic education has to be viewed in the light of the emerging nature of rural politics under the PR system.

But one has to be aware not only of the space that this new form of collective empowerment has opened up but also the traps it entails. PR politics may evolve as democratic and competitive, but it may, on the other hand, assume pronounced partisan overtones. Often, in rural areas, there are close links between teachers and local leaders. In fact, educated members of the rich peasant class often take to the teaching profession as a subsidiary occupation. Given this, one cannot rule out a possibility of PR politics serving as a protective umbrella for negligent teachers. Moreover, considering our heritage of a strong caste hierarchy, the village school system is to be viewed as not only an incentive structure but also a structure of power defined in terms of relations of

caste dominance and subordination. The schooling system, under PR supervision, may act as a vehicle of caste privilege; alternatively it can create a space for actualization of low caste social ambition (if, for example, the provisions on reservation of seats for vulnerable groups enshrined in the recent PR Act lead to their effective empowerment).

A recognition of the possible interplay of these opposed strategies of domination and social protest will enable us to make a reasonably ambitious yet realistic assessment of what can be achieved under the PR institutions. Expecting inevitable improvement in school performance under the auspices of the PR system will be tantamount to falling into yet another rhetorical trap that 'all good things must go together'. Above all, any feasible local school management plan, involving community representatives, parents and school professionals must design its institutions such that they can be run efficiently by people without supernatural characteristics – people, in particular, who spend a good deal of time thinking about themselves and not about the promotion of local democracy.

The foregoing is an attempt, albeit limited, to address the task of unpacking the lessons of the country's educational past to inform choices and programmes for the future. And the inescapable conclusion that emerges is that despite the many competing priorities before the policy makers, an awareness must grow among them that the failure to provide adequate educational facilities *within the framework of regular village schools* (no matter how many ad hoc, alternative educational channels are opened) is likely to mean the failure to weed out the most stubborn root of educational malaise in our country. It is, therefore, hard not to echo the simple but powerful message of Dreze and Sen (1995, p 10), 'There is, in short, no escape from the need for a major improvement of public schooling facilities in rural India.' The more binding precondition is, however, to break the spell of political slumber vis-a-vis the appalling conditions of the schooling system in Indian villages and make the authorities rediscover the (political) will.

Operation Blackboard

CAROLINE DYER

THE scheme of Operation Blackboard (OB), under the NPE 1986, has been a comprehensive illustration of the shortcomings of the management of primary school education. Although they profess to share the same goals, tiers of government at the centre, state and district levels have yet to evolve a *modus operandi* by which to work together to achieve their aims.

OB arose from the All-India Educational Survey findings which revealed that, in 1978, 40% of primary schools had no blackboard, in 1986 almost two-thirds of those schools had 4-5 classes operating simultaneously either in a single room (38%) or in two rooms (32%). Belatedly, it was becoming obvious that school-related factors must at least to some extent be responsible for the high drop-out rate: in 1986, some 49% of primary school children dropped out before completing the lower primary cycle. OB therefore aimed to set a benchmark norm for lower primary schools: a minimum of two rooms, two teachers and 'minimum essential' teaching learning aids. All existing schools were to be brought up to this level and in future no schools should be sanctioned unless they met the minimum norm requirements. This would therefore bring closer the policy aim of shifting teachers towards a more child-centred, activity approach to teaching, and through this improvement of schooling, to bring closer the ultimate goal of UEE.

The centrally-sponsored scheme was devised by the centre, whose viewpoint was that 'there must be a benefit because teachers would be correlated with rooms and equipment' (key MHRD official, 1992). It was an all-or-nothing package, so state governments had no option of tuning it to their own requirements, if they chose to accept OB. And, predictably, no-one thought to involve teachers in the planning or execution of OB: it was

¹ The piece uses the example of Gujarat from which to draw both state-level and wider implications.

simply assumed that teachers must have been starving for aids and would therefore use them, and that improvements in schooling would automatically follow. A further major difficulty was the impossible time-frame, which declared that 100% national coverage would be completed within three years

The overt agenda was therefore problematic enough, but it was further complicated by an agenda which, behind the scenes, had a very negative impact on management functioning. The NPE 1986 provided the first opportunity for the centre to exercise its newly-defined 'larger responsibility for motivating and... ensuring proper management of the programmes', granted to it by the constitutional amendment of 1976, which placed elementary education on the concurrent list. It would be of great importance to the MHRD, if it wanted to secure such large-scale funding as was allocated to OB, to make a success of this scheme.

The centre's role in OB did not begin well, since there was a tremendous rush to get started. The NPE 1986 stipulated an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture that funds from existing Rural Employment (RE) schemes would prioritize construction of school buildings under OB. After negotiations, only 'general agreement' was reached, and the RE manual was not changed, so officers lower down the ladder were not even aware of this agreement. This was a major stumbling block for states, who found it hard to get school buildings, with their high material and low labour requirements, accepted under the schemes. Also, a blanket price was set (Rs 52000 per room unit) which did not take into account regional variations, or the soaring price of cement.

Teachers, whose salary was borne by the centre for the rest of that plan period, were not problem for the centre since it was up to the states to locate and employ them. But teaching-learning aids were another fraught area, since the centre – very rightly – feared that quality would be compromised unless tight specifications were laid down, and the usual system of tendering was changed at the

state level. The NCERT was charged with preparing the specifications, which it did in methodical detail, but they were not available until two years after the scheme had begun, by which time at least the first round of purchasing had been completed. Gujarat officials later termed the specifications 'irritating and unrealistic'; one wonders if it was really necessary to specify that a football should be 'spherical in circumference'?

The centre was to ensure that all the components of the scheme were adhered to by refusing to release funds unless the states gave 'assurances' that they fulfilled all the conditions laid down in the OB guidelines. However, in the case of Gujarat, it waived the assurance since it had 'no real' apprehension about their commitment' (MHRD file, 21.3.88). So, although the assurances were critical to the maintenance of the notion of quality, they were set aside in the interests of getting the scheme implemented quickly.

Perhaps this could have been addressed had the centre a proper monitoring scheme. But it relied for information on the quarterly progress reports, in common use in all sectors, which provide only quantitative information of progress towards set target. They are of no use as a diagnostic management tool, as was amply illustrated when Gujarat, with no progress to report on, stopped sending QPRS for as much as a year at a time.

Once this was realised, the centre convened a seminar at which management issues were discussed, and it was decided that states should adopt the Programme Evaluation Review Technique, which allows goals and activities to be mapped onto a time-frame. States were asked to work out and submit their PERT sheets, and the centre sent out an illustrative sheet a couple of months later – Gujarat promised to formulate one for the next phase of OB, but it never did. The centre thus had no real way of knowing what was happening at state level, apart from annual conferences and occasional meetings with state-level personnel.

What, then was happening at the state level? As is often the case with

centrally-sponsored schemes, the states wanted the money, but not the conditions. From the beginning, Gujarat was ambiguous about the buildings, and about having to provide so many TLA, when it felt that problems such as children not regularly coming to school were still untackled. The state secretariat, bogged down in trying to implement the individual components of the scheme, was blind to the policy element behind OB, specially that teaching and learning would begin to improve if all schools had at least a minimum level of equipment, teachers and space. Thus: 'we all make the proper sounds but what we are getting when we launch a programme like OB is a marginal increase and what they are expecting is a quantum jump in the quality of the school. Really, it's only a trill.' It was not obvious, however, that the secretariat had a strong policy agenda of its own, which it would put in place if adequate funds were available. Rather, the notion persisted that as long as there is a school building and trained teacher, education will somehow happen.

The state Directorate felt that OB was too comprehensive, and was doubtful that teachers would bother to use the materials. The memory of the UNICEF science kit experiment in the 1970s, unused boxes of which were often present in OB schools, was still fresh in the Director's mind. In his view, the problems of primary education stem from the lack of commitment and low capacity of teachers, 'from which point of view, the material is immaterial'. If he had a say in the formulation of the scheme, he would have suggested a much more modest and incremental approach to attempting to change teaching practices in schools.

Administratively, the Directorate felt that management problems were unavoidable since primary education is in the hands of the District Education Committee, under Panchayati raj. Senior state level officers feel unable to regulate affairs because of the administrative status quo, since in their view the committee, as a statutory body, does not feel answerable to the state government. State officials contented themselves with issu-

ang and re-issuing orders, but often without any real expectation of action from the district. Since there was no PERT or similar management tool, there was no planned time-scale, or framework for follow-up and/or remedial or preventive action.

Not one of the centre's suggestions was followed up at the state level with regard to the improvement of tendering procedures; alteration of the Dead Stock Register so that teachers would not feel they were personally responsible for the TLA if they broke, or provision of contingency money to allow teachers to replace broken equipment. Thus the state government did not take seriously any of the conditions of the OB scheme which would, in the long run, ensure the quality improvement and minimum norm the OB scheme was trying to put into place.

At the district level, there was no sense of urgency about OB, which was treated as a set of remedial tasks to be implemented as and when funds became available from the state government.

Under the Programme for the Mass Orientation of Primary Teachers (PMOST), teachers received an orientation to OB that was inadequate for practical purposes. They mostly did not make use of the new TLA, with the exception of the charts, which, as little more than a textbook page, follow naturally in the textbook culture the policy was trying to change. However, the bureaucratic management of education did not make it its business to find out whether teachers were using the aids, or whether OB had in fact made any difference to schooling, since as far as it was concerned, once the rooms, teachers and TLA had been delivered, the scheme had been implemented.

The outcome of OB in Gujarat has been its total dilution; in its fourth phase, it has been extended to a building programme covering upper primary schools. The notion of minimum norm has proved too difficult to convey to the state government, which persists with its own numerical norms governing allocations of teachers and rooms to villages, and has now left provision of TLA up to teachers

who, as noted earlier, often have no interest in using them.

This brief account of OB leads to some important questions for the future. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that educational management does not have in place any system that can furnish the qualitative information required if any improvement is to be made. It does not, as yet, understand what goes on in schools and therefore what steps should be taken to improve them. It is not clear that district planning offers any solutions in this regard, since it will be the same machinery that conceives and implements these plans.

It is essential for centre and states to find a mutually acceptable formula by which dialogue and trust are encouraged. Gujarat, sensitive to the political ramifications of this intrusion into its affairs, did not respond to the centre's attempt to kickstart the UPE programme. The centre did not structure OB realistically, either financially or temporally and, pushed to show results, made nonsense of the scheme by failing to hold the states to their promises – a triumph of politics over educational quality. It retained a 'control' orientation, adopting a rather ambivalent strategy of coercion, but Gujarat refused to be coerced.

At present, the educational agenda is subordinated to agendas of power and control, attention must turn to how to construct a meaningful partnership among the differing tiers of government, with their very different interests and capacities. The 'top-down' norms of the bureaucracy do little to create a climate in which feedback, essential to good management, is expected from the lower level officers, who are much closer to operating realities than those who conceive policies. In a management climate where introspection is often regrettably absent, no one accepts responsibility for the outcomes of poor management: it is comfortable and easy for each tier to assign blame to another tier. The losers, of course, are the children who, as a result of the indifference endemic among management and teachers, are pushed out of school.

Lessons to learn

ROHIT DHANKAR

THE curricula so far prescribed have largely been lists of facts and bits of information to be 'learnt' by rote. Most of them mention some educational goals and objectives but make no serious attempt to answer three key questions:

i) What is the justification for accepting the goals or aims of education assumed in the documents? ii) What is the relationship of goals or aims accepted with the stated objectives? and iii) What is the relationship between educational aims and curricular specifications on the one hand, and between curricular objectives and curricular specifications on the other?

In India, there is a common tendency in curricular documents to arbitrarily choose pleasant-sounding, vague sentences which serve as the aims of education. But when it comes to listing curricular specifications, both aims and objectives are forgotten. As a result, these three aspects are presented as being completely unrelated and arbitrary.

This approach not only fails to convince and inspire, it has nothing in itself which can anchor the teachers' commitment. No one is clear about what we are trying to achieve through education and how teaching the prescribed course is likely to help in achieving it. Therefore teachers force their students to cram, with no clear notion of the benefit of the exercise. We have no philosophy of education, nor are we even aware of its need.

The MLL* document tries to make marginal improvements by focusing on the competence of the child rather than on mugged-up facts, but the specification of these expected competencies remains arbitrary. In this article I do not propose to discuss the list of competencies which

are often no more than bits of information. Instead, I take a look at the assumed aims of education and the underlying dangers of focusing on competencies without an understanding of the aims. I will also examine the supposed basis of the values and comment on one of the ways recommended to inculcate those values.

Two specific statements regarding the aims of education occur in the document. I will first discuss the one which appears later in the document. This is contained in the opening sentence of chapter VI which is on non-cognitive areas of learning: An 'all-round development of the personality is the ultimate goal of education and therefore the learning experience provided in the school should contribute towards the achievement of this end.'

The phrase 'all-round development of the personality' is an all-encompassing one. Aims which are all-encompassing are used as handy tools to include what we want provided in the 'learning experience'. They are generally used when we want to run away from providing rigorous justifications for their inclusion. The MLL statement is used precisely for such a purpose. But statements that are all-inclusive fail to provide direction for obvious reasons. This is not to say that 'all-round development of the personality' cannot serve as an aim of education, but we need to explain what we mean by this phrase. The MLL document does not provide this explanation. Moreover, the list of values recommended to be inculcated in children is clearly not derived from this aim. Obviously, we need not take it seriously.

The theoretical basis of the document is stated on page seven, chapter II: 'That the children' reach a minimum level of learning before they finish primary education that would eventually enable them to understand their world and

* *Minimum Levels of Learning at Primary State*
Report of the committee chaired by R H Dave. The
Department of Education, Ministry of HRD. Pub-
lished by NCERT.

prepare them to function in it as permanently literate, socially useful and contributing adults.' This is stated to be the aim of primary education. It seems to me that this has four mutually related aspects (a) understanding the world, (b) ability to function as a permanently literate adult; (c) ability to function as a socially useful adult, and (d) ability to be a socially contributing adult.

Aspects (a) and (b) indicate certain capabilities and skills to be developed in an individual through primary education. Aspects (c) and (d) indicate the reasons why such capabilities and skills should be developed. It is important to pay attention to (c) and (d) because the real purpose of primary education is stated here, and this purpose defines the extent and quality of the capabilities and skills indicated in (a) and (b). Thus the aim of primary education, according to this statement, is to teach children to become 'socially useful and contributing adults' on growing up

Is such an aim of primary education valid in a democracy? What does it mean to be 'socially useful'? Can anyone who lives in a society be 'socially useless'? Anyone who is a part of society and is able to make a lawful living is socially useful, otherwise he would not be able to sustain himself. A bonded labourer, a rag-picker, an obedient and exploited household servant, are all socially 'useful and contributing adults.' They are both socially useful and 'used', for their existence presupposes some 'users', who may be useful in their own turn. This utilitarian approach thus establishes an exploitative relationship and as long as this exists, society will be used by a section of it. Surely the system of education must aim higher than merely turning out useful adults.

The purpose of making children 'permanently literate' is to ensure against a relapse into illiteracy. Illiteracy is anathema because 'we' need a skilled or semi-skilled labour force. Had we aimed higher, we would not mention permanent literacy because the ability to read and write is a basic requirement of the daily grind: reading and writing are much more than just permanent literacy.

One might think that the ability to 'understand their world' is a redeeming feature in this aim of primary education. Though not sufficient in itself, it would indeed have been positive if it were not qualified with phrases like 'permanent literacy' and 'socially useful' adulthood. But here, just enough understanding to fulfil these purposes is required, and therefore the scope of this vital capability is severely limited by keeping its definition so circumscribed.

The aim of primary education is thus to produce a kind of citizen who is literate, of profitable use in our economy and an economically viable unit. The interesting point is that the same people who subscribe to such an aim for primary education are also moved by ideas of equity and social justice. Their argument is that given our limited resources, this is all that the state can offer children through education. Those who want more can add what they like provided they can afford it. Consequently, the state tries to make all children equally useful, but those who put in more can turn their children into 'users' leaving the less fortunate to be 'used'.

Let us now consider whether primary education can aim higher and start from the only potentially redeeming point in the MLL statement of aims, namely, that education should help children 'understand their world'. We can identify two opposite approaches here. In the approach taken by the MLL document, the world to be understood is given, and what is not given by nature has been prescribed. We have prescribed a certain kind of democracy and constitution as well as a direction to socio-political and economic development. By understanding the world in this sense, we learn that the aim of education should be the ability to gain a position in the socio-economic scheme of things in such a way as to strengthen the system and sustain oneself. This approach points towards a certain kind of understanding, skills, values and attitudes. If we pick them out and make a list we can formulate our curriculum.

Let us now look at another approach. If we begin to reflect on our

own understanding of the world, we realise it is neither complete nor faultless. Our prescriptions for the socio-economic and political order of things are similarly riddled with faults. Thus we are in no position to prescribe 'a particular understanding of the natural world' to our children as *the* understanding. Nor are we in a position to prescribe our preferences of socio-political-economic order for future generations. We are well within our rights to impart the understanding of the world we have, as well as our prescription to our children; we can even say that it is our duty to do so, but it should be done in a non-binding manner. The possibility of a different understanding and of different prescriptions must not only be hinted at: it must be established.

How can we do this? Firstly, by avoiding positive conditioning, and secondly, by ensuring that we not only impart an understanding, but also create the basic tools to develop understanding. Imparting knowledge is important but developing a grasp on the process of knowledge-generation is more so. Teaching skills are significant, but teaching how to learn skills is more important. Similarly, teaching mathematics is important but teaching how 'mathematical knowledge' is generated is more important.

Once we accept this approach the situation changes. We do not limit ourselves to developing competencies in language, mathematics and so on, we become interested in the development of competent and interested, independent learners. Therefore, the emphasis in our choice of particular competencies changes from what is normally useful to what is fundamental to independent growth in a discipline. What is useful could be learnt on the basis of the fundamentals, but the reverse is not necessarily true.

This way of thinking will also affect the methodology of teaching more significantly than a list of competencies might suggest. It is possible to develop the competence to solve problems of daily life involving calculations in a manner that will make the student almost

unable to learn any further mathematics and will put him off the subject. If our aim is merely to enable him to solve everyday problems he is likely to encounter as a carpenter, we shall choose the quickest method which will help develop that competence. But if we are interested in his ability to learn mathematics independently, we shall choose a method which develops both the interest and capability of learning and enjoying mathematics.

The aims of education make a significant difference to curricular prescriptions, learning/teaching processes, organization of schools and, therefore, to achievement. In short, aims impact the *quality* of education.

This is precisely the point which the MLL document misses. Aims are mentioned only in passing and a list of competencies is provided rather than content. It may be a step in the right direction but is too limited to be satisfactory. Primary education is of no help if it does not enable children to grow into competent, motivated, independent learners. A list of competencies is essential for becoming an independent and interested learner but certain attitudes to learning and capabilities like rational thinking are also required. All these are more or less overlooked in the MLL document.

The chapter on non-cognitive areas of learning raises several important questions. The MLL document proclaims that the basis for specifying or prescribing values, attitudes and habits (all called 'affective qualities' in the document) is the Constitution of India.

All Constitutions are political documents. They are not sources of values, nor are they framed to engender them. In fact, they are framed to only uphold and protect the values a society chooses for itself. When a society deems it fit to change its value structure, Constitutions are amended or rewritten. By accepting the Constitution as the basis for values to be preached in schools we shall be paving the way for its misuse as political propaganda. Our commitment to the Constitution should not be one of

blind faith but based on a critical appreciation of it. Before we admire it we should analyse and understand it.

The choice of values to be inculcated is a difficult one. But simplistic solutions like using the Constitution as a basis will not do. Education will have to go deeper in search for values. It is quite possible that the values chosen on the basis of certain criteria coincide with the values enshrined in our Constitution. But it is also possible that the values chosen on the basis of those criteria contradict the values enshrined in the Constitution. In that case we may have to work to change the Constitution.

What are those criteria? Briefly, rationality of the human race, sensitivity towards fellow humans and our socio-cultural situation will throw up a fundamental value structure, a complex framework of values which will help us identify particular ones and rate them against each other.

The MLL document considers the development of values to be non-cognitive. Values are also considered as belonging to the affective domain. Though the document rightly emphasises school organization, role of the teacher and so on, as effective ways of developing values, it also contains two anti-education suggestions: that the teacher should be a role model to be imitated, the other related dictum is that non-cognitive characteristics in the affective domain are 'caught rather than taught'.

If values are seen as 'non-cognitive characteristics in the affective domain', these two recommendations logically follow. Therefore, let us reflect whether values can be considered in a non-cognitive affective domain. A mortal fear of spiders does not require us to understand what fear is, nor why we fear spiders. Such a fear could be called a non-cognitive affective reaction. On the contrary, to hold fairness as a cherished value, it is necessary to understand what fairness is. How then is the inculcation of the value of fairness a non-cognitive affair? It is obvious that merely upholding fairness as a value is not enough. To develop values also needs understanding,

the ability to reason and so on, all of which are cognitive exercises. Values draw upon both cognitive and affective domains and the role of the cognitive is as important as, if not more than, the affective. Therefore, emotions and not values are the only affective occupants of that domain.

If values are not affective entities, then the dictum 'caught rather than taught' does not apply to them. Yet the MLL document continues to do so. While it is true that values cannot be taught like mathematics, it is equally true that they should not be caught either. 'Caught' implies imitation without understanding. This will simply reinforce the existing value-system without any critical examination. Secondly, those who have power, authority and glamour are more likely to be imitated. Thus there is little likelihood of the right values being inculcated in children through this method.

But there are even more serious objections to this method of inculcating values. Education should develop critical thinking in children and the idea of imitation goes against it. Children should be able to question their teachers. Only the worst kind of teachers would want to mould their students exactly in their image. Children may imitate their teachers but teachers should actively discourage imitation without understanding. Education should strive to bring as much of the affective domain within the range of rational reflection as possible, for that is the only way to check emotions like fear, anger and hatred.

Values are neither taught, nor should they be caught. They are to be developed. Sensitivity, an ability to see oneself in the other's place and a capacity for sound reasoning are the only acceptable bases for developing values. We need not indoctrinate children into a list of prescribed values; they should be encouraged to develop their own lists and criteria. We have the faculty to reason, similar sense-perceptions, and a very broad common basis of experience. We will develop value systems which will have common points and be mutually interpretable and intelligible.

Hard thinking needed

MAXINE BERNTSEN

IN VIEWING recent developments in primary education in India – at least in Maharashtra, with which I am most familiar – I find myself guardedly optimistic. The District Primary Education Programme, the Anandadayi Shikshan Programme, the School Complex Plan, and the efforts to implement the Minimum Levels of Learning all seem to indicate that the central and state governments are taking seriously their commitment to universalise primary education and to improve its quality.

If my optimism is guarded it is because past experience has shown that both at the national and state level a tremendous flurry of activity and rhetoric raises hopes but ultimately everything fizzles out and we are left more or less where we were at the beginning. The experience of the first five years after the announcement of the National Education Policy, 1986 is a case in point.

If this time the central and state governments – and the country as a whole – are serious about our efforts to universalise primary education and to improve its standards, we need to critically examine both our goals and our strategies for attaining them.

First of all, in regard to goals we must not set our sights too low. There is in our educational administration, politi-

cal leadership and society as a whole a tacit acceptance of the fact that there is and will continue to be a vast difference between the level of private schools on one hand and government (zilla parishad and municipal) schools on the other. It is true that the overwhelming majority of children in government schools are poor and/or belong to the Backward Class. It is also true that the experience of other countries such as the United States confirms that raising the educational standards in school populations like these is a herculean task. Nevertheless if we start with the defeatist attitude that our government schools will always be third-rate then they most certainly will be. Our goal must be that the standard of government schools should not only be equal to that of private schools in the country but should be comparable to that of the best schools anywhere in the world.

Formulating our main goal in this way makes it clear that the issue is basically a political one. If we have dragged our feet in implementing primary education programmes, it is mainly because government schools being mainly for the poor, no one really cares about them that much. Now if we are serious about our programmes we must summon the political will to implement them effectively.

Some years ago, C. Gopināth Rao of the Administrative Staff College, Hyderabad did a study of the relative success of various states in implementing literacy programmes. He found that the crucial factor was not economic prosperity but political will. Given the commitment to impart education to the masses a state can succeed, despite economic backwardness.

In a way, 'political will' seems too amorphous a concept to be so crucial in the success of education programmes. What is it and how can it be summoned? Obviously, if a political party comes to power with a clear mandate for educational change it can muster the political will to demand a high level of performance from administrators and teachers. But in most of our states this is not the case. The political agenda is set not by the poor but by the middle class who do not perceive that they have a stake in the success of the government school system.

In the absence of a clear political mandate it is imperative that committed proponents of change in the government, in the administration, among teachers, parents and the public at large join forces to demand a critical examination of the government's educational policies and vigorous implementation of those policies that stand scrutiny.

One of the first policies that requires scrutiny is that regarding access to primary education. While on the one hand we give lip service to the principle that all children between the ages of six and fourteen must be given free and compulsory education, we too readily accept the fact that this is not possible and then declare that we will achieve Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) by the year 2000 by giving non-formal education (NFE) to all those who cannot be covered by the formal system.

The central government's own documents are candid about the origins of NFE, if unduly optimistic about its outcomes.

It was for the first time, in 1986, that an educational policy admitted that the school would not reach all children,

particularly millions of girls and working children whose participation in the school system is thwarted by socio-economic parameters. The policy called for a large and systematic programme of Non-formal Education (NFE) as an integral component of the strategy to achieve UEE. NFE should, the policy stresses, have quality comparable with formal education, but with enough flexibility to enable learners to learn at their own pace.

Further light on the motivation for NFE is found later in the same government document. Describing the Shiksha Karmi project in Rajasthan as one of the innovative projects of NFE, the document says that the project 'seeks to tackle the problem of teacher "absenteeism" in remote villages in Rajasthan state by substituting primary school teachers with a team of voluntary education workers or Shiksha Karmis selected by the community.'

Let no one misunderstand. From whatever I have heard the Shiksha Karmi project is an innovative and vital programme delivering basic education to children who would otherwise be deprived of it. The same is true of any number of non-formal education programmes being run by dedicated professionals and NGOs throughout the country. Nevertheless, the question remains: if non-professionals receiving only a token payment can do an adequate job of teaching, what is the point of having our elaborate system of school administration, teacher training and accreditation? Government sponsorship of NFE as an alternative to the formal system can ultimately serve only to further weaken the formal system. While such programmes undoubtedly fill a need in certain circumstances, they must be recognised as the last resort and the temporary stop-gap arrangements they are.

If we agree that the focus of our efforts must be on the formal system, what steps do we need to take – both immediate and long-term – to strengthen this system? To begin with, we must take a hard look at the problem of access to the system. We hear a great deal about chil-

dren who stay out of school because they have to work, but very little about those who are denied entrance into primary school because they lack a birth certificate. In Maharashtra, at least, a G.R. issued by the state government several years back made it clear that no child shall be denied admission to primary school because of the lack of a birth certificate. Despite this unequivocal order, principals continue turning children away, and parents wishing to obtain a birth certificate are forced to run from pillar to post and to pay exorbitant charges. A vigorous publicity campaign to inform parents that a birth certificate is not required for school admission, along with strict monitoring of admission practices, will unquestionably bring a large number of children into the system.

One of the most heartening of recent developments in primary education policies is the new willingness to admit frankly that the standard of education in most government schools is abysmally low. After all, it is only when we admit that there is a problem that we can take steps to solve it. In an effort to rectify the situation, in-service teacher training is being conducted on a massive scale, and programmes like the District Primary Education Programme and Anandaġi Shikshan are attempting to bring some life into the dreary educational landscape. However, from some of the reports I have gotten it appears that the quality of the in-service training often leaves much to be desired.

Perhaps all over the world educationists have a tendency to bandy about slogans, and in this country we do so with a vengeance: 'joyful learning', 'child-centred education', 'activity-based learning'. These slogans are not nonsensical; each one expresses a powerful truth about the way in which a child learns. But if we teach our teachers only to mouth the slogans without grasping the truth underlying them, we are only giving them a meaningless mantra. Similarly, certain techniques like teaching through singing, dancing and play can become mechanical tantra if not employed with common sense.

and balance. While I heartily endorse the use of music, dance and play in school instruction, I confess that sometimes in hearing an exposition of Anandayi Shikshan I have a vision of teachers and children dancing to the point of exhaustion, forgetting what was the purpose of their frenetic activity. What we need to give teachers in our in-service training is an approach, a point of view that develops out of an understanding of the learning process and a concern for the child.

While much attention has been given to the need for retraining of teachers, little thought has been given to the need for changing the attitudes, increasing the knowledge and expanding the horizons of middle-level educational administrators and teacher educators. Our administrative culture fosters arrogance on the part of those in control, and sycophancy, resentment or indifference on the part of their subordinates. Individually and in groups, teachers are harangued for their own failures and those of their students. Teachers treated in this way can hardly be expected to develop a sense of care for their students. (That despite all odds, so many teachers are caring is a tribute to the resilience of the human spirit!)

Whether or not they are arrogant in dealing with subordinates, many administrators and teacher educators have such limited experience that they have never seen a good school in operation, nor have they any idea about the educational scene in other parts of the country, leave alone the rest of the world. Ideally, these people should have the opportunity to travel both in this country and abroad to see what is happening in education. But the cost of such a programme would be prohibitive. However, the increasing availability of good video films on schooling both in India and abroad means that it is feasible to expose a large number of administrators and teacher educators to current trends in education.

The problem of bringing about attitudinal changes in teacher educators is more difficult. How this could be done I am not sure. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to conduct some experimental

sessions using modern methods of management training. I make this suggestion with some trepidation, as I have always looked with skepticism at such techniques. Yet they might be worth trying. Conducted with sufficient skill and sensitivity, such sessions could help bring about some change in attitude.

One final suggestion about administrators (and this applies to those on the higher level as well) they must be allowed to stay in one position long enough to show results or to be accountable for not doing so. The present system of transferring an officer after two or three years means that s/he is transferred just at the time s/he starts to have an impact.

In addition to improving the in-service training of teachers, we must also take steps to improve the basic training of primary teachers. The effect of such improvement will, of course, not be visible for many years. As a speaker pointed out at a recent conference, the majority of teachers in the public system are fairly young, and will be working for another twenty to twenty-five years. Nevertheless, the foundations for long-term improvement must be laid now. The 'Challenge of Education' document stated the problem succinctly.

Teacher performance is the most critical input in the field of education. Whatever policies are laid down, in the ultimate analysis they have to be interpreted and implemented by teachers, as much through personal example as through the teaching-learning process. We are at the threshold of the development of new technologies likely to revolutionise teaching in classrooms. But, unfortunately the process of updating the curricula of teacher education has been very slow. Much of teacher education is irrelevant even to contemporary requirements, leave alone those of the future. The selection procedures and recruitment systems for teachers have not kept pace with the needs in terms of either number or quality.

The recent trend in Maharashtra to admit students to the D.Ed. course after

they have passed the Higher Secondary Certificate examination (twelfth standard) rather than S.S.C. (tenth standard), is a step in the right direction. There is an abysmal lack of general knowledge among the majority of students who have studied only up to the S.S.C. level. Those who have completed the H.S.C. tend to be somewhat better. Teachers with a B.Ed. generally have a fairly good fund of general knowledge, but they are considered unqualified to teach in primary school (though they are considered qualified to teach the D.Ed. course).

Despite the central government's assertion that the quality of teacher education needs to be improved, there has been little change in the content of the D.Ed. course, and administrative indifference or opposition tends to frustrate efforts made by private institutions. For instance, several years ago a number of private institutions in Bombay and Pune developed a diploma course in early childhood education. The curriculum was solidly based on the latest theories of child development. The course was recognised by Bombay University, and the diploma-holders were considered qualified to teach classes from pre-primary up to third standard in government and government-recognised schools. However, a couple of years ago the state government issued an order that holders of the ECE diploma could not be regarded as qualified teachers. This action is just one instance of a general desire to keep all power and initiative in the hands of the bureaucracy—what an American observer (speaking of his own country) has called 'the lust for bureaucratic control'.

Another promising development in the field of teacher education is the institution by Delhi University of a B.Ed. course in primary education. Such a course should be implemented all over the country and should actually be a prerequisite for those who are teaching in D.Ed. colleges.

Any talk of educational reform is ultimately meaningless unless we can provide the funds to implement the measures envisioned. The Indian government

has declared that 'the national resolve of augmenting the public outlay in education to 6 per cent of the GNP has to be translated into practice at the earliest.' Obviously, the earlier that happens, the better. But whatever the amount of funds available for education, certain habits of thinking need to be changed.

Since the days of the Indian struggle for Independence, there has been an assumption that India is a poor country and in the field of education we must do without even the most essential equipment. There are still people who never tire of reminding others that they learned to read and write with a dhul-pati (sand-slate). The only legitimate expenditure is considered to be that incurred for salaries of teachers and staff. As the 'Challenge of Education' document pointed out, 'more than 90 per cent of the expenditure (in some states even more than 98 per cent) is spent on teachers' salaries and administration. Practically nothing is available to buy a black-board and chalks, let alone charts, other expensive teaching aids, or even pitchers for drinking water.' 'Operation Blackboard', which was launched with some fanfare several years ago, was an attempt to rectify this situation. I have not seen any statistics on Operation Blackboard, but certainly on the local level I have not seen any evidence of its impact.

But let me return to the main point: the habits of thinking on the part of officials. In a recent conference on primary education it was suggested that primary school children learn better if they use worksheets. The immediate response of the government official present was that even to provide one worksheet per child would be prohibitively expensive; therefore, it was out of the question.

Right now I do not want to go into the question of whether having worksheets is a good idea or not. But, just for the purposes of the argument let us assume worksheets are essential. We can then look at the matter in a different way. Since worksheets are essential, and we do not want to increase the financial burden on parents, we may decide that for the first standard, at least, it is not necessary for

every child to buy the textbook; the textbook can be provided in school, either in the form of large charts for each page, or in the form of well-bound books that are available for use in the classroom. The money saved by the parents could be used for buying a workbook. I could give any number of such examples, but the basic point is simply that first we can ask what is necessary from an educational standpoint; then we must ask if and how the funds can be made available. Often this will involve a rethinking of our allocation of funds.

If extreme parsimony governs the thinking of administrators in regard to government schools, the same is not true for their thinking in regard to government-aided private schools. In Maharashtra, at least, government-aided private high schools (standards five to ten) get generous grants for libraries, laboratories and computers, while the government schools (zilla parishad and municipal schools) with standards one to seven get absolutely nothing. When asked how this state of affairs could be justified, an official told me that the local self-government bodies are presumed to have their own funds, while the private schools have no other resources!

A further irony in all this is that a student wishing to leave a municipal school and enrol in a private high school for standards five to seven is not allowed to do so, according to the policy of 'no internal migration'. It is obvious that administrators fear that if students were free to transfer out of government schools, some schools would fall empty and be forced to close.

Thus we are back to the point made at the beginning of this paper: ultimately the problem is a political one. If we are to improve access to schooling and the standard of education in government schools, committed administrators, politicians and members of the general public must join forces and demand change. Without that basic commitment, all our rhetoric and all our plans will be (to fracture Shakespeare's phrase) so much sound and flurry, signifying nothing.

Engineering education

N J RAO and S K BISWAS

THE quality of education bears a close relationship with the society it serves. Society invests in education in order to train its manpower with the knowledge and skills needed to create and operate activities related to its economic, production and infrastructural matters. For too long, India has been burdened with a mechanism of licences and controls along with a weak political commitment to the universalization of education. An economy with excessive controls and a very large population creates a market where a customer has to make do with whatever is offered to him. Suppliers are under no pressure to improve the quality of their goods and services.

The field of education suffers from a similar malaise. The problem here is more complex with over half the country's population illiterate. Quality education has the potential to change this scenario which is out of step with the high-tech and excessively competitive global economy of today. Unfortunately, the state of education in the country is far from capable of meeting this challenge. The relevance and quality of higher education are considered unimportant. Strong vested interests resist any effort to bring about systemic changes either from above or within. This article explores these forces.

In engineering education, serious problems exist at the level of planning such programmes. It is possible to create a more meaningful framework if we recognise the autonomous nature of engineering and engineering knowledge. We detail some experiments, undertaken in different parts of the country, which recognise that engineering educational

institutions do exist to train manpower for industry. Their limited success indicates that it is possible to bring about a qualitative change in engineering education, provided certain conditions are ensured.

The most dominant characteristic of Indian higher education is its uncontrolled growth since Independence (Altbach, 1993).¹ This expansion serves powerful forces in society. Many believe that economic and social upward mobility is associated with the post secondary degree. Statistics indicate that degree-holders eventually, if not immediately after graduation, find white-collar employment. Thus, entering colleges and universities is of immense importance to aspiring middle class students. Such expansion also serves those powerful political interests who see academic institutions as a base of political influence and power. Neither is interested in a better quality of higher education. Such an enhancement of standards would place limitations on their power. Add to this reservations based on communal identity and gender, the managements of private institutions constantly fighting for higher management quotas and you have a situation where the quality of education is nobody's concern.

Uncontrolled expansion of higher education has also resulted in a resource crunch. It is now clear that governments, whether at the state or centre, are unable to adequately finance higher education. Consequently, new financiers are emerging. For instance, banks now offer

¹ P G Altbach, 'Dilemma of change in Indian higher education', in *Higher Education Reform In India, Experience and Perspectives*. Suma Chitnis and Philip G Altbach (eds) Sage Publications, 1993

educational loans. Unfortunately, because the number of seats available in institutes of higher education is insufficient, students are still not in a position to demand better quality instruction despite paying a higher fee.

Major changes are unlikely to come from within the system. Academics are conservative when it comes to institutional change and generally oppose reform. In almost every country and historical circumstance, the academic faculty has opposed changes in higher education. Major reforms are seen as a threat to the established patterns of work and job security of the academic profession. In India, this profession is unionized and, in some institutions, politicized to a significant extent.

A centralized examination system has been another bane of higher education in the country. Except in few selected institutions, examinations shape the curriculum and determine the nature of instruction. They reduce the autonomy of the instructor in the classroom and severely limit innovation. Whatever cannot be evaluated through a centralised examination does not find a place in the curriculum. While everyone agrees that the present examination system is unsatisfactory both in content and process of implementation, no significant changes – except marginal ones like ‘question banks’, spot evaluation and national level supervision – are in the offing. An analysis of this state of affairs reveals that a reform of the present system does not suit the short-term interest and convenience of a majority of students, teachers, institutions and the bureaucracy.

Most higher education programmes in India operate in a closed context. Obviously institutions of higher learning exist because the products of these institutions are needed by different sectors of industry and government. Industry, the main customer, does not exert any pressure on educational institutions. Higher education is an important part of society, closely linked with its political and social systems and in need of change, development and improvement. However, in

order to plan for reform and improvement it is necessary to understand the interrelationships between different forces in the society.

The economic well-being of a country and its people depends greatly on the quality of its skilled and technical manpower. This includes skilled workers (formally or otherwise trained), certificate – and diploma-holders and engineers. There is a strong link between the system of education in advanced countries and their industrial innovation. Whenever nations failed to adapt educational programmes to changing industrial trends, they paid a price. For example, leading educators in the US trace the loss of a market for many of their products to unsatisfactory high school education and misplaced priorities in engineering education at the undergraduate level.

Problems relating to technical education begin at the level of high school. Imparting primary features of engineering knowledge and methods (practical constraints coupled with quantitative data, synthesis, solving problems which are ill-defined to start with and multi-dimensional in nature, and working with inadequate information) and simple fabrication skills are not considered essential for school level education. There is a constant demand to enhance the mathematics and science content. This despite the fact that a majority of students who enter the education system drop out of high school to earn a living practising a technical trade.

It is interesting that in India the facilities for craft-learning at the Industrial Training Institutes are abysmally low. These institutions suffer from a chronic lack of qualified (sometimes even unqualified) teachers, and laboratory and fabrication facilities. While certificates from such institutions are required for jobs in factories, the knowledge and training they provide is negligible. Not surprising, while 80% of industrial innovations start from shop floors in western economies, such innovations in India are conspicuous by their absence.

Not only is the skill requirement for Indian industry low, it is prepared to put up with a long and expensive initial training period. This situation is symptomatic of low productivity in stagnant small and medium scale industries. Goods of low quality are sold to a captive population with low purchasing power. The higher end of the industrial scale, primarily run on ‘blue print’ and ‘screw driver’ technologies, displays a low level of innovation. In recent times, they are run more as subsidiaries of multinationals. Thus the primary and secondary educational institutions in the country churn out a large army of youth with low skills and a knowledge base that has little to do with the needs of industry.

Engineering education faces two related problems: the absence of an appropriate framework for undergraduate programmes, and an academic training which is unrelated to the needs of industry. With industry not influencing the nature of training, academic institutions have drifted away from engineering-centred education to engineering science-centred programmes. Moreover, engineering education also suffers from a proliferation of private institutions, admissions based on factors other than merit, lack of autonomy both at the level of teacher and institution; an increasing preoccupation of administrators and faculty with processes related to admission and examination rather than teaching, non-availability of good teachers and other factors which are common to all higher education programmes in the country.

The current undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in engineering, despite some changes, have evolved in the context of a framework decided over three decades ago. The essence of this framework, as practised today, can be stated as: ‘a good training in engineering sciences constitutes the necessary and sufficient condition for one to become a good engineer.’ When the emphasis shifted in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s, it was a significant step forward from handbook and empirical design methods to engineering

sciences. During the last 35 years, many of the design and manufacturing oriented subjects have been gradually purged from the system. The few that remain in the curriculum receive scant attention either from the faculty or students. A majority of the engineering faculty believe that engineering is an applied science, so engineering is viewed as a subset of science

The authors wish to proceed from the premise that engineering, like science, history, economics and philosophy, is a unique branch of human knowledge with its own objectives, methods, categories of knowledge, tools, values and social interface. While some elements are important to other branches of knowledge as well, the manner in which they exist within the framework of engineering, in interaction with its other unique dimensions, provides it an autonomy within the compass of total human knowledge. Engineering is at present considered a field of applied science to be specialized in at the post secondary level. Yet in the pedagogy of general knowledge it finds no place at all. It is as if engineering, unlike science, history or economics, has no contribution to make in the shaping of an individual and in equipping him to live in a competent and responsible manner.

Any attempt to define engineering raises the issue of the relationship between science, technology and engineering. These three are different entities, though they relate to one another and interact in complex ways. The primary concern of science is to understand nature and its main activity is the generation of new knowledge (experimental and theoretical) regarding the laws of nature. Technology is often perceived as 'the application of science to industry' This definition is historically incorrect and greatly misleading, although certain 'science-based technologies' have emerged in recent times. Technology was practised long before the concept of science and scientific method evolved. The histories of science and technology followed different paths, and really began to interact after the industrial revolution. While a close and complex interaction exists between

science and technology, their objectives, activities and values are quite different. Technology can be defined as 'systematic knowledge and action, usually of industrial processes but applicable to any recurrent activity'.

Any engineering activity involves people, money, materials, machines and energy. Engineering may be defined as the 'application of objective knowledge to the creation of plans, designs and means for meeting the needs of people and society at large'. Technology deals with the tools and techniques for carrying out these plans. Engineering activity thus cannot isolate itself from the issues related to its relationship with the rest of society. Its main concern is, therefore, synthesis (design) – the combining of separate elements into a whole. Though engineering sciences reformed engineering practices, thus immensely increasing their scope and improving reliability, engineering goes beyond engineering sciences.

We may now reflect on the role of an engineer. An operative definition may be one where 'the main task of an engineer is to find and deliver optimal solutions to technical problems, within the given material, technological, social and environmental constraints, through the application of scientific, technological and engineering knowledge'. In defining the framework for an undergraduate engineering programme one may ask, 'Where do graduates of this programme go from here?' The jobs an engineer is likely to undertake on graduation can be broadly classified under the following categories: product design and development, product engineering, custom engineering, manufacturing, installation and commissioning, operation, maintenance, education and training, marketing, sales, management, development of entrepreneurship in technology and systems, and research in engineering science.

Marketing, sales and management jobs require special skills and knowledge of non-engineering areas. Thus they cannot form the focus of undergraduate education in engineering. Most jobs related to research in engineering sciences

and education require knowledge and training at the postgraduate level. This area cannot be the focus of undergraduate education either. More than 85% of engineering graduates initially take up jobs related to technology and system development, product design and development, product engineering, manufacturing, quality control, customer engineering, operation and maintenance. These jobs may be placed under three broad categories: design and development; manufacturing, and utilization.

The jobs considered under 'utilization' are those related to operation, maintenance, installation, commissioning, and engineering services. Most of these require on-job training in procedures specific to the plant/equipment under consideration. As mentioned earlier, the main task of an engineer is to find and deliver optimal solutions to real-life problems. The most important aspect of an engineering programme, therefore, ought to be to provide the student with the experience to solve an actual problem with all its attendant constraints. The processes associated with synthesis (or integration) are quite different from those related to analysis. Often these processes cannot be brought under academic formalism and can only be learnt through doing and experiencing. The broad aim of any undergraduate engineering programme should be one of preparing the students to effectively participate in the engineering activities of design, manufacturing and utilization.

We now detail three experiments in restoring engineering to engineering programmes. These are: Sandwich Programmes at the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Pilani; the PSG College of Engineering, Coimbatore; and, a postgraduate programme in Electronics Design and Technology at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.

The sandwich programme in different branches of engineering at BITS is over 20 years old and extends over a period of four and a half years. The students spend a significant amount of time in identified industries in a structured manner. Faculty are identified specifically to coordinate

the activities of the students in these industries and R&D laboratories. Their extended stay exposes the student to the working of industry. Students are also expected to identify a problem of interest to industry under the guidance of a faculty member and a representative from the industry. After preliminary exploration, the student is expected to work out a comprehensive solution at the institute. The faculty worked hard to establish this infrastructure at a number of industries and at R&D laboratories around the country to make it a success.

The sandwich programme at the PSG College of Engineering at Coimbatore is of a five-year duration. Students spend their morning sessions in industries learning about industrial practices either through observation or formal training. Afternoon sessions are devoted to classroom and laboratory instruction. The formal content of this engineering programme is not much different from the regular programmes. Industrial training in the first two years is confined to the PSG Industrial Estate. From the third year, students are placed in other industries in Coimbatore. This programme, begun in 1987, was initially unpopular because of its long duration. Once industry found these graduates more productive and relevant to their requirements, its popularity steadily grew in spite of its higher tuition fee. Unlike the BITS programme, students get their industrial exposure and training in and around Coimbatore itself, which make its organization more convenient.

The Centre for Electronics Design and Technology (CEDT) at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, offers an M. Tech. programme in electronic design and technology. The main objective is to train engineers as creative designers of electronic products and systems. The framework within which this one-and-a-half year programme works, may be stated as:

- * Electronic products are different from electronics.

- * Design and development of an electronic product involves an optimization under several criteria and requires an integration of several technologies.

- * Successful development of a product is the result of team effort.

- * Development of a product requires detailed planning.

- * The students must experience all processes relating to design.

- * Product design and development should be accompanied by detailed documentation

All courses, including the electives, carry one credit laboratory each and are heavily oriented to design. It is through the project that students gain the essential experience in the design of electronic products. To make this experience meaningful, projects are sponsored by industry, are planned in detail and well-orchestrated in implementation. Such a design-oriented programme, which aims at developing the first production prototype of a product from the conceptual stage, demands a resource-rich environment. It took several years for all the elements of the programme to fall into place. The graduates of this programme are now in great demand by industry. A significant percentage (25%) of the graduates have eventually become entrepreneurs.

The experience of the three programmes indicates that it is possible to incorporate an engineering orientation without sacrificing engineering science content. Graduates of such programmes are preferred by industry. The experience gained by the students in handling real-life problems encouraged a significant number of them to become entrepreneurs.

Experiments of this nature can only be conducted in well-defined, autonomous contexts and around a motivated and integrated faculty. These experiments cannot easily be duplicated in all institutions, but it is always possible to innovate in any context and restore engineering to engineering education.

It is important to remember that the most important player in this endeavour ought to be 'industry'. Without relating our engineering courses to the requirements of industry, we will not only fail to make progress in industry, we will instead see more and more engineering students turn to management-oriented courses.

Practising sociology

DIPANKAR GUPTA

EDUCATIONAL institutions in India suffer from several handicaps: lack of funds, direction, post education employment, and most importantly, lack of prestige. The situation is equally bad at the school and university levels, but the reasons behind them are different. This is as it should be, for they are qualitatively different educational institutions.

The system of government-run school education which flourished till about 50 years ago in India has now completely failed. In the past, even village schools produced well-rounded students who went on to city colleges. A lack of resources is one of the reasons, but behind this failure is the fact that state-run schools now lack prestige. Once the Indian middle class sent its children to state-run public schools: today they go to private schools. Nobody cares any longer how such schools fare, justifying their bias by declaring that private schools are better. Matters have reached a stage in certain public or government-run schools where only a small minority actually pass the board examinations.

However, one cannot overlook the fact that some private schools are really very good. Students here learn more than they may in the first three years of college. In fact, those three years in college contribute most to an unlearning experience. Students lose out on rigour and application as there is no pressure on them to perform. Naturally, the situation is worse in the humanities and the liberal arts courses. But given the quality and standard of education at the school level, even science students in Indian colleges are tested at well below their potential. Why is the pressure suddenly taken off at the college level? Middle class children have not abandoned college education like they have government schools, so the answer must be sought elsewhere—perhaps in the system of higher education itself.

Higher education does not work on the same principle as secondary education. For instance, school teachers require skills of a different order from those that are demanded of university teachers, or teachers at professional institutions (such as medicine or engineering). I am, of

course, talking of the best of them. In schools the emphasis is on how well the teachers can impart the basics, take the child as close to the advanced stages of received knowledge, thus inculcating a yearning for learning!

In universities, on the other hand, the teacher must also be an innovative researcher at the frontiers of his discipline. This is why the university teacher is often impatient with basics, and indeed may be less articulate than his counterpart in school. He may not have the wide range of general information a student needs to integrate different branches of learning at the practical level and may feel constrained by the course structure of a classroom. Yet the university teacher will still be respected for original research which contributes to the international fund of knowledge. Being a competent teacher or a buddy to the students is simply not enough because a university is respected more for the renowned researchers on its faculty than for competent teachers.

The reason why some universities are better than others is because of the formidable research reputations their faculties enjoy. The teacher-student relationship works differently at the university where students are expected to be charged by the atmosphere of learning and not wait to be guided on the basics as in school. University students want to learn, for they see exemplary faculty members renowned for research work as role models. Where teachers do not have such reputations, students are not enthused enough to put in their best and get away with a degree which does not really test their potential.

This is equally true of professional institutions. Students there usually undergo the harsh regimen quite enthusiastically. But in professional institutions where the faculty do not have credible research reputations, they are unwilling learners, making it quite clear that they have come for a degree, not to be taught. This is generally true of those professional colleges where capitation fees are charged and of engineering colleges routinely set up by politicians in their constituencies

Given this background, it is not at all surprising that there is greater student unrest and campus violence in institutions where teachers have low international research prestige and recognition. In fact one can trace a direct correlation between teachers' reputation and student unrest. There are exceptions, but a rule that emerges is: high teacher research ability is accompanied by low student activism. Therefore, whenever there is student unrest the teachers should take a hard look at themselves. Why do institutes like the Delhi School of Economics or the Indian Statistical Institute have such placid students? Take their faculty's researchers away, put in plodding teachers instead, and the situation may become quite different in a few years.

That higher education gets its prestige from research and not so much from teaching is a truth that is hard to appreciate. People, politicians, and Parliament judge a university by the number of students it produces. There is constant external pressure on universities to justify their funds on the basis of teacher-student ratios, and the total number of MAs, M.Phils, or Ph.Ds churned out each year. From time to time, university teachers are also subjected to proformas (a recent one was inspired by the Punnaiya Commission) to determine how many contact hours a week a teacher spends with undergraduate, graduate and research students. There is also a column on the number of hours a teacher devotes to research. This is really a token presence, for MPs and ministries are not actually interested in matters of research: all they are concerned with is the student-teacher ratio.

University enrolments must be of a certain magnitude because of this pressure. Students are accepted in M.Phil programmes whether they have an aptitude for research or not. As universities have to be pragmatic, and often because their vice-chancellors are hoping to find a political office after their term is over, they readily accede to such pressures. Student-teacher ratios give the external agencies an objective index by which to judge these institutions of learning.

The emphasis on teaching rather than on research has already played havoc at the college level. Often outstanding scholars go to seed in colleges where they have to teach as many as six to eight hours a day. Occasionally they may manage some study leave only to return to the same grind. The study leave and the Ph.D. that may result is a one-shot affair, never to be repeated again in their active career. The more they teach the less time they have left for research. This makes it nearly impossible for these college teachers to make independent academic reputations. Consequently, the institutions to which they are attached slowly lose recognition as centres of learning, though the staff slogs away in classrooms for hours on end. The drop in reputation encourages the belief among students and their parents that a college is really meant just for granting degrees. Over time, teaching practically stops and nobody misses it either. Non-serious professional students make the campus their hangout, giving colleges and higher education in general a bad name. This train of events may sound exaggerated, but it is true to the logic of the situation.

Rarely do university teachers realize that if their teaching load is lighter than that of college teachers, it could be profitably utilized for research to raise their academic rating. After all, this is the basis on which their worth, and with it that of their university, is assessed. The fact is that nobody really talks openly about it. This does not mean that such judgments are not made, but that the grounds and rationale for them are so deeply ingrained at the unconscious plane that they are rarely, if ever, deliberately articulated. Higher education thus has an unwritten charter which people rarely talk about, and this is what makes it so difficult to achieve excellence. Teachers have to make their reputation through research, and students must want to study with them because the teachers have a certain prestige.

In a good university, that is one which has prestigious teachers and hard-working and outstanding students, one

finds the student body excessively receptive to the teachers and, consequently, self-driven in terms of course work. A teacher in such institutions rarely ever spoon-feeds the student, nor holds him by the hand and practically writes his dissertation. In the better-known British universities, for instance, supervisors rarely spend time with their research students, let alone being closeted for long hours with undergraduate scholars. In spite of being so distant and alienating, which is hard on gentle and timid students, there is little public outcry. This is not to say that this extreme should be upheld as a model, but it only goes to show that it is not student-teacher interaction, in the classroom sense, nor the number of students enrolled, that produces either good professors or good students

The popular belief is that a university exists to educate the young, make them proficient in their respective disciplines, and so on. All of this is perfectly true. But what is equally true is that a university will attract the brightest and the most motivated, and the degrees conferred on them will carry the highest reputation, only if these institutions have professors of repute. In fact, such teachers are often notoriously forgetful of the actual content of their course structure and frequently lecture at length on their immediate research preoccupation. Do the students stand up and revolt and write angry letters to MPs? Obviously a lot depends on the teacher's prestige. Indeed, there have been instances where lecture notes are assiduously kept by doting students and are later published to bring added glory to the professors. Quite clearly these professors were not lecturing from a list of recommended reading. In many reputed universities this is a common enough occurrence, though not many professors have had students mop up their notes after them and publish them as books. Ludwig Wittgenstein and George Herbert Read were among the few to have been so fortunate. The point nevertheless remains: students don't complain if teachers have intellectual recognition, regardless of whether or not they deliver their

lectures according to the handbook in the classrooms.

For this reason one should not be surprised if the public at large also respects those institutions which have professionals of research eminence on their faculty. Many young university and college teachers labour under the impression that a good teacher makes a prestigious institution, and, what is more, grateful and brilliant students. This, as I have contended, is not the whole truth. In fact, the reason why many good institutions have declined over the past 50 years or so is not because good teachers have left these universities and colleges, but rather because these institutions have lost those with international research prestige. The brain drain from Calcutta, which began in the 1960s, to the Delhi School of Economics, and elsewhere in the capital, is illustrative of this phenomenon. This large-scale intellectual exodus from Calcutta began first with academics with huge research reputations, followed by students. This has virtually drained some of the best institutions of higher education in Calcutta of their hard-won prestige.

It would, however, be wrong to say that there are no good teachers in such places of learning. In fact, students from Calcutta are still very good, obviously the level of teaching imparted to them is of a high order. Even so the best students are leaving the city not because university schedules are never on time but because most students know that, sadly enough, intellectual institutions in this old Presidency no longer have the kind of national and international prestige they once boasted of. This should not be taken to mean that there is nobody of international repute in Calcutta, but that the city lacks the critical mass necessary for institutes of higher learning to function with charisma.

Political interference is, of course, the most obvious reason for the decay of some worthy institutions. Among the casualties I would not only include Calcutta University, but also universities at Lucknow, Aligarh, Allahabad, Madras and Varanasi. Yet on the face of it, each

of these institutions is thriving. They are packed with teachers and students, run the full complement of courses and, in most cases, are even able to hold their examinations on time. When we consider what has happened to standards in these universities, we should remember that their deterioration is primarily because the community as a whole did not encourage research in these institutions when it should have.

We have accepted the western notion that original research is not our forte, that we should leave such matters to the more developed countries. According to this line of reasoning, it is only advanced industrial societies that can afford to pay impractical people to keep their heads in the clouds. In fact 'theory' itself is a bad word in India and many politicians, lay people, and sadly enough, the majority of university academics too, disparage it thoroughly. Consequently, research activity in India has moved away from universities to specialized institutes, and a city like Bangalore is full of them. Today most of these institutes have a higher reputation and prestige than the universities. While the university in Bangalore may not be renowned, the same cannot be said of the various research institutes that have come up in there. Whether pure science, nuclear science or social science, Bangalore has some of the best institutes in India. In most of these institutes there is nominal teaching activity, but their real orientation is towards research. If only universities in India could be run like the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore!

Good though these research institutes are, they cannot replace universities in terms of large-scale teaching and in granting degrees. Universities alone can do that. The catch, however, is that the only way universities can be really prestigious is if they give full encouragement to faculty research. University teachers, ideally speaking, are doubly burdened. They must teach and also pursue research. The more carefully and diligently they do the latter, the better the quality of their students. This gives rise to the illusion that

the standards of teaching in these institutions are very high. The reality, however, is that the students who manage admission here are self-motivated to begin with for they wish to emulate their teachers.

Research opportunity does not just mean time off for research, but facilities to do research. This includes finances, infrastructure, and an understanding university bureaucracy. Since we have let the research advantage slip away, there are few Indian institutes of higher learning that enjoy international prestige. The only way to fight brain drain is not to have just rich universities, or pay professors a lot of money (which is by itself unthinkable), but to encourage fundamental and theoretical research. If Delhi and Bangalore seem to have an edge over other cities in India, it is really a very small advantage and not worth gloating over. Moreover, even in these cities there are only a few institutions that are respectable, such as the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), the Indian Institute of Science, National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS), or the Delhi School of Economics, and it certainly does not apply to scores of other institutions and colleges in these cities. The standards of these institutes will not last long either for everybody knows that real prestige lies in the West. It is about time that policy-makers and educationists realize that without encouraging research in the country, we cannot stem its brain drain.

This holds true for academia in general. Institutions are afflicted differently but it is all a matter of relative degree. The social sciences are no worse off than the physical sciences. That the social sciences in our country seem singularly dismal is because, of late, social science curricula have progressively been made easier. In many universities where the medium of instruction is the regional language, social science curricula are limited to books available in that language. The language problem is less severe in the other sciences, though it exists there as well, but is glaringly evident in the social sciences.

The social sciences seem to manifest a Mother Teresa mentality: this attitude tries hard to ease the burden of the suffering scholar. The worst offenders are probably the departments of sociology in the country. Sociology and Anthropology were considered difficult disciplines till roughly around Independence; then began the process of making these disciplines easy. It is now not only easy to teach sociology but to conduct research in it as well. Compare, for example, the course in sociology in Lucknow University in the 1950s with what is taught today in most Indian universities. The difference in academic content is quite remarkable. Instead of going ahead with the times we seem to have moved behind in this regard. Keeping alive a few departments of sociology which teach Foucault, Mannheim, Husserl, Parsons and Levi-Strauss does not really help in maintaining the health of the discipline. Such institutions become alien in their home setting and with time begin to look more and more towards the West, even in terms of their research agenda. There is nothing wrong in using western theories, for no true theory can be territorialized. The problem is that often these advanced departments of sociology, pressured by their sense of alienation at home, tend to even write for the West and carry out research agendas devised in Europe or America.

There must be a concerted attempt to make sociology a difficult discipline again. This does not mean that we should make it incomprehensible. Here again we must pay attention to the quality of research. We cannot limit our research aptitude to being just good respondents and observers. We cannot afford to be lulled into the belief that we are good only when we think with our feet and feel with our hearts. We have to rise above such petty sentimentalism, use our heads, construct theories and take on important and pressing issues of life as matters requiring the deepest and most complex of research programmes. The western world, of course, believes that we are incapable of advanced fundamental

research. Should we give in to their fantasies? A famous sociology book by an Indian writer carries a glowing testimonial by a renowned American anthropologist on its back cover stating that it is of a very high quality, combining the Indian genius for observation with western theoretical refinement. Interestingly, the author of the book did not object to such a patronizing gesture, nor would most others. Indian academics have largely cast themselves in the good observer mould, so the American did merely express this reality when he wrote the testimonial.

Sociologists in India can no longer be happy with such certificates and should indeed demand that they be considered at par with the rest in the world at the level of high theory, even meta-theory. Why is it that when Talcott Parson or Alfred Schutz write about social theory they never mention 'case study—middle class Protestants in the Eastern seaboard'? They write with their own societies in mind, but the analytical conclusions they derive are cast as universal truths, applicable to all societies. In India, on the contrary, we suffer from excessive caution. When we have a conceptual point to make we immediately circumscribe its validity by a limiting sub-title. Thus, we stay within the realm allotted to us by the West, taking pride in being down to earth.

It has never done academics any good to be down to earth in such a literal fashion. The sociology of science teaches us that all great scientists were impractical and theorized a little ahead of the actual facts available to them. In sociology, however, there seems to be a distaste for empirical adventure, reflected in the manner in which sociologists carry out their field work.

There has been pressure on Indian sociologists from the international body of sociologists since the 1950s to conduct village studies, when the Chicago school and departments of sociology elsewhere in the world started to evince an interest in the Indian village. There is nothing wrong with this, provided the researchers at home have an agenda of their own. But

that is not all. The real debasement of village-based field work started when research scholars began to choose their own villages for field work. This was rationalized on the grounds that the scholar's intimate knowledge of the village would benefit the quality of the research findings, but in most cases this was far from true. After gifted field workers like Srinivas legitimized this enterprise, hundreds of others did the same and it was all so easy. Field work, which was supposed to be tough, now began to resemble a paid furlough when one could go home and write long letters.

As field work became easy it gradually began to lose prestige. The results of these back-home-field work based theses are there for all to see. Barring a handful of exceptions, the large majority of them do not deserve to be read, much less awarded a doctoral degree. Often they are published so that the researcher's CV looks respectable. Such activity gives research a bad name, although most sociologists justify it claiming that they have been at the grassroots, depicting reality the way it is.

The task before sociologists, especially those at higher institutes of learning, is to make their discipline more challenging. They must consciously reject the down-to-earth, do-gooder attitude. Field work should mean going to a place other than home, acquiring some basic skills in a different language and, most importantly, learning to cope with the unfamiliar. The famous anthropologist Evans Pritchard once said that the job of anthropology is to make the unfamiliar known in familiar terms. This is what encourages theoretical and conceptual activity. To make the familiar known in familiar terms puts no pressure on our critical faculties, producing observations which rarely rise above the level of tedious gossip. Moreover, according to an old English adage: 'He little knows England who only England knows.'

In many ways sociology is perhaps the hardest discipline to practise among the social sciences. This is because a sociologist must always be able to formu-

late fresh research problems. The scholar cannot depend on the field to come out with anything worthwhile. Contrast this with the economist. It is true that economists envy physicists and would like to model their discipline on the line of physics, but they really have an easier time. Economists are not pressured to produce their own data. They are fairly promiscuous in this matter and will take data from any agency so long as the information is in numerical form. Economists have relied on the National Sample Survey (NSS), Census reports, Ministry of Finance statistics, figures from the Bureau of Industrial Costs and Prices and so on. The advantage they have over sociologists is that they have ready-made data. They can use their mathematical skills on such data and something new is bound to emerge at the end of the day, some hitherto unsuspected correlation will show up sooner or later. It is because economists have a hospitable field that it is possible to produce a substantial number of mediocre economists from amongst whom it is possible to isolate and train an exceptional few.

History too has an advantage over sociology. Their bailiwicks are monuments and archives whose study is not every lay person's idea of an afternoon well spent. In many instances a historian has to learn a language (often arcane), but in every case must pore over material whose novelty is easily discernible. There are bound to be several things that happened in any particular year which will have something unusual and startling about them. At the end of a historical study, new and perhaps even unsuspected facts are made known. This again allows for the production of large volumes of mediocre, but readable, stuff in the discipline. The better historians use this as a kind of a seed bed for producing research papers of excellence.

Thus, both economics and history can support a large number of mediocre talent. This is why it attracts better students than sociology, which either has a legion of poor sociologists or very few outstanding ones. They are excellent because their discipline does not easily

lend itself to mediocrity. On the contrary, it encourages the sub-mediocre. The good sociologist cannot just write about society, the neighbourhood, because nobody is interested in it for nothing new is likely to emerge from such depictions. Sociologists must, therefore, have a clearly stated research agenda. Since it has to be consciously made each time, only the better minds are capable of doing so. The rest go to their villages and call it their 'field.'

There is a crisis in higher education and it is reflected in sociology as well. It has little to do with the fact that ideals are crashing all around or that the Soviet Union has collapsed. Robert Nisbet (1970)¹ has demonstrated that sociology arose out of the late 19th century intellectual crisis in Europe. Karl Mannheim in his masterly work on *Ideology and Utopia*² (1936, especially Ch. II) has shown that it is in periods of intellectual crisis that thinkers are actually able to see the limitations of existing structures of knowledge. Far from being a debilitating feature, crises have helped intellectuals to innovate and enlarge the frontiers of their disciplines.

In reality the crisis in sociology is of a different order altogether. Sociologists today are not concerned about the intellectual crisis, unlike Ghurye, D. P. Mukerji or Nirmal Bose were at another time. The crisis in sociology is because the discipline has become too easy. Even field work has become a simple exercise. The discipline is no longer intellectually challenging, hence it carries no prestige. Students who enrol in sociology now believe that their department should hand out as many degrees as possible without making a fuss. This, as we discussed earlier, is the view that the public and the politicians in power tend to take towards higher education in general. Sociology, as practised today, only reflects in an acute form the malaise affecting higher education at all levels.

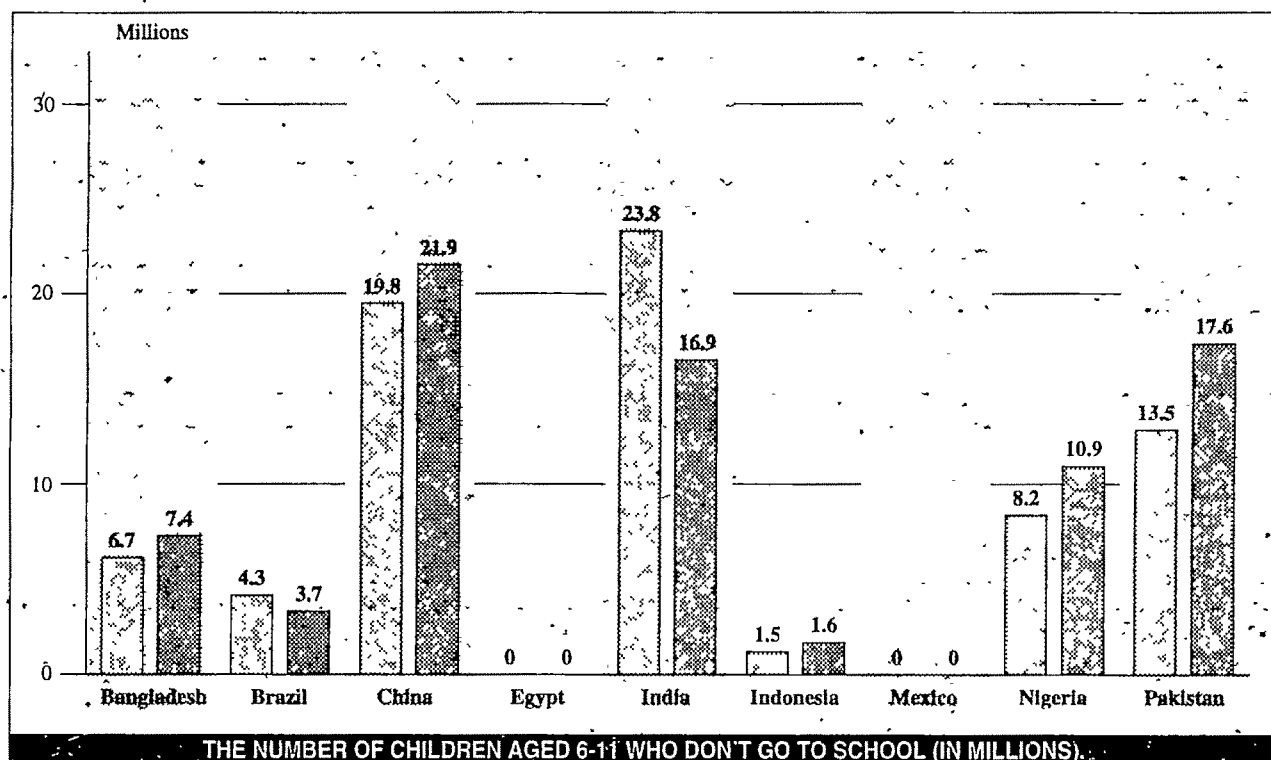
1 Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936.

2 Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, London: Heinemann 1970.

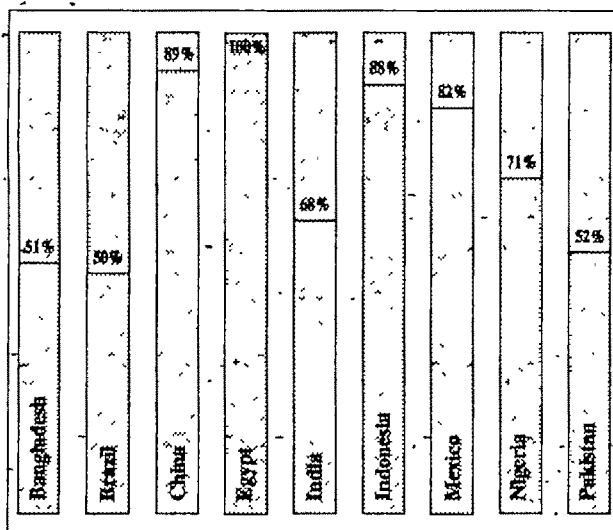
78 MILLION CHILDREN OUT-OF-SCHOOL ...

In most of the nine countries represented below, Education for All remains a goal that will be difficult to reach without an enormous effort

OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN



DROP-OUT RATES

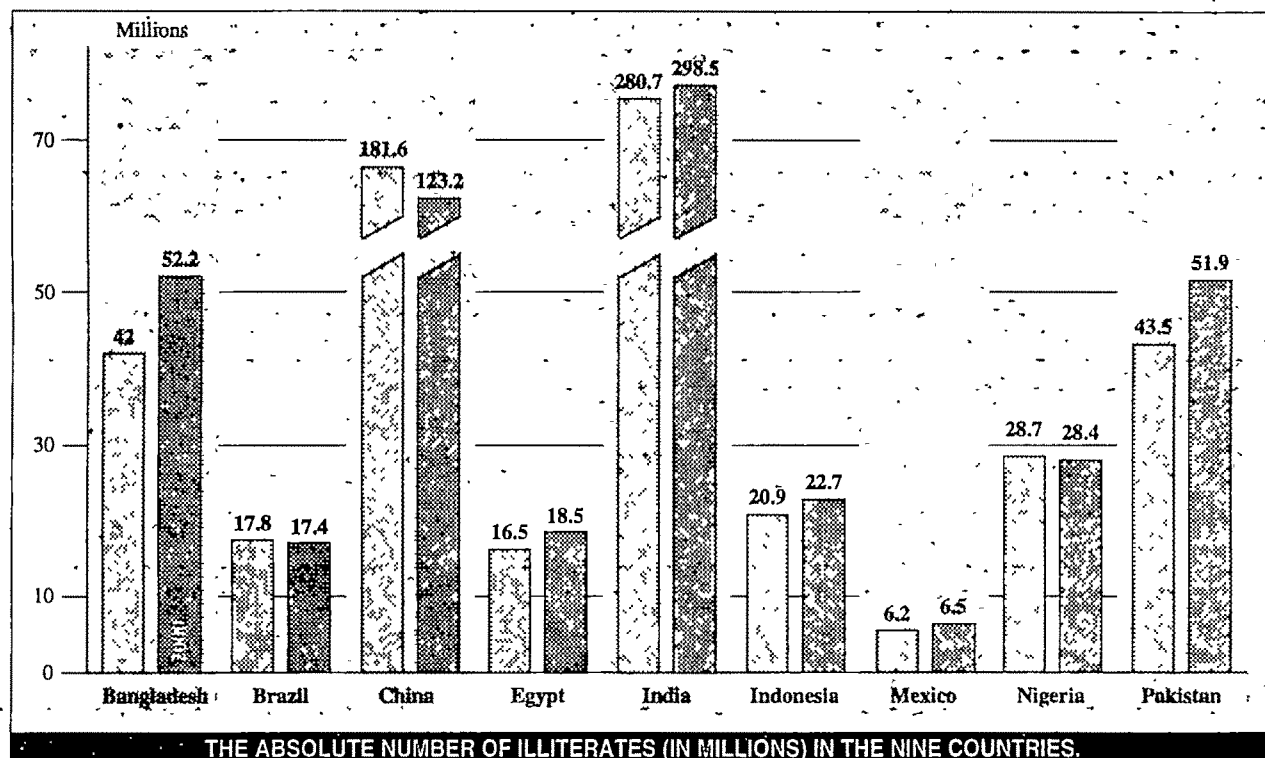


The above graph shows the number of children aged between six and 11 for whom school is inaccessible in each of the nine countries represented. The graph presents data from 1991 and previews the situation for the year 2000. The predictions for the end of the century do not take into account the effect of recent measures decided on by these countries to boost the Education for All effort. The graph opposite indicates the probability—measured in percentages—for a child who entered grade one in 1989 to reach grade four. According to UNESCO, the completion of these first four years is the minimum needed to acquire a basic education. As is apparent, not all succeed. Many children repeat years and then abandon their education—usually for economic reasons. In such cases, much of what has been learnt is quickly lost

... AND 638 MILLION ILLITERATES

Not all children go to school, or even have a school to go to, and eventually join the ranks of illiterate adults whose numbers are swelling faster than literacy programmes can keep up with.

ADULTS WHO CANNOT READ OR WRITE



The figures presented in the above graph are based on current trends and do not take into account the possibility of new measures to counter adult illiteracy.

According to accepted definitions, those aged 15 years and over are considered literate when they know how to read, write and understand a simple text about their daily lives.

The percentage of illiterate men and women is falling everywhere, without exception. This has been attributed to an overall improvement in the numbers of children attending

school. On the other hand, the absolute number of illiterates is climbing. While it may have shrunk slightly in China, and remained static in Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia and Nigeria, projections to the end of the century indicate big increases in Bangladesh, Egypt, India and Pakistan.

Source: UNESCO, Division of Statistics
Infography: A. Damon

Travels with Yashpal

PADMA M SARANGAPANI

Delhi, 20 April 1992

Dear Amma,

I'm thrilled. I'm going to work with the Yashpal committee. This is a National Committee to examine the burden on the school-going child and to address the issue of the quality of education. Prof. Gajendra Singh's mother calls it the 'basta bojh' (heavy schoolbag) committee. I'm going to study textbooks from all over the country and assess the 'load' in them. Yesterday I went to a meeting at NCERT. Prof. Yashpal was there of course. There are seven other members – three women and four men, all educationists – Prof. Gajendra Singh, Dr. G. Chaudhuri, Mrs. Madhu Goyal, Prof. Kamal Dev, Prof. Uma Narayan, Mrs. P. Rai and Dr. T.S. Kashyap.

Yashpal's style is grand; believes in doing things on a big scale. He would like to get to the grassroots and assess for himself what this burden on the school child is all about. Dr. Kashyap kept talking about some research that NCERT had conducted to study load. They had concluded there wasn't any, that the main problem was bad teaching and poor facilities. Of course I think they are wrong. Textbooks are full of rubbish. You wonder what rationale it is that decides that children *have* to know all that stuff! In any case, Yashpal simply dismissed the research. He didn't even argue about it. Kashyap is also all concerned that the committee must make a 'scientific' study of the load. As if anyone knows how it is to be done scientifically. Fortunately no one else on the committee seems to be inclined to 'scienticize' the problem of a heavy curriculum. The committee will 'go to the people' to understand the problem and find a solution. An advertisement will be placed in the papers, inviting parents and children to write in their opinions!

The names of all committee members except for Prof. Yashpal are pseudonyms

Learning to Change

Teachers from all over the country are to be met. Kashyap wants all the meetings in Delhi, but the committee members are more keen on travelling around the country to meet teachers. And Amma, I'm going along too. The members will fly. I will travel by train: from Delhi to Trivandrum, to Pune and finally Calcutta.

love,
P.

Delhi, 7 May 1992

Dear Ma,

Aunt Vinita was very impressed when I told her about working for the committee because Yashpal is heading it. Perhaps she feels that I may be doing something worthwhile after all. Otherwise she likes to describe my changing over from physics to education as moving from the sublime to the ridiculous. They seem so trivial to her – the issues of how children learn, of whether they should be learning the alphabet first, whether they should be conducting experiments while learning science... She's convinced the whole problem lies in bad teaching and the policy of reservation. Why reservation? Because then we don't care about quality, and so we 'create' bad education. She loves to cite the example of a student in Prashant's medical college, who came in through reservation and has failed for the fourth time, as 'proof'. I'm not sure what this 'proves'. Actually I'm not sure if she thinks this committee has any useful work to do. She would prefer that it investigate the utility of reservations. It's useless trying to make her see that there are other issues in education that merit attention too. For her it's all to do with schools that don't work, lack of discipline, unemployment and reservations. Arguing with her gives me a headache. She connects everything with everything.

The committee had another meeting. I must say the bureaucracy treats people quite shabbily. They have a whole baggage of rules they pull out to verify and dispute expenses being claimed by members of the committee! It got to the point when I wondered why the members didn't just quit out of sheer disgust. I was then impressed by their wisdom at not letting such petty harassment direct their decisions, else self-respecting, thinking, sensitive humans would simply be denied opportunities to influence policy.

There seems to be no consensus in the committee on what the problem is, or even if there is a problem. Gyan Chaudhuri is convinced that the real problem of schools in India is just to get them to work; there is no load, because nothing is taught. He feels that any talk of load and of curriculum is a diversion – a problem of the middle class. Madhu Goyal is clearly very distressed by the primarily urban mobile class phenomenon of putting very young children through preschool, where children are taught writing and numeral work, to prepare them for the class I entrance tests of elite public schools. Prabha Rai seems to be sitting on the fence. On the one hand she says children in school are pressured from a very early age to compete and learn things that they are not yet ready for; later they have to cram for engineering and medical entrance tests. At the same time she says there is no load, and that committed teachers would make all the difference. Gajendra Singh believes that the pressure arises from ill-conceived curricula, in a vacuum of any reflection on principles of curriculum construction. Dr. Kamal Dev's stand, though worded differently, is similar. He is particularly concerned about 'redrawing the learning curve'.

I gather the NCERT faculty has been met with. They seemed to think from the beginning that they would be the primary target of this inquiry.

love,
P.

Delhi, 16 May 1992

Ho Radha,

My head is spinning after two whole days of listening to teachers from the northern states.

Yashpal's style of functioning came as a surprise to the teachers (and to many in the committee too, I suspect). He is so obviously a person of stature, and yet he has a way with people, putting them at ease with his informality. He certainly speaks in an eccentric manner – spiralling along from his childhood to his youth in Jabalpur, from his work with teachers in Hoshangabad to his experiences as a space scientist, switching easily from English to Hindi. I was struck by the elegance of his formulation of the problem and his inspiring, even innocent, faith that a solution exists. He throws the net far and wide in his search for answers. He spoke about shifting attention from the physical burden to the burden of non-comprehension. How information is being confused with knowledge, how textbooks are crowded with a little of everything, with little opportunity to go deep into anything. He invited the teachers to tell the committee... Why is learning a burden? Where is the problem? What are the aspects that need to be changed and how? How are we to create programmes through which there would be real learning?

But it was as if the teachers hadn't heard a word of what he had said. Perhaps they couldn't focus on the issues he was raising. They began talking, and Yashpal just let them talk and talk, and talk...

The problem everyone claimed they were responding to was, 'why do children find school burdensome?', but it quickly expanded into 'what's wrong with education?' The entire gamut of issues was raised – non-functional village schools, overzealous, poorly-trained and underpaid teachers of the teaching shops called public schools, language policy, tuitions, public examinations, cheating, guides, non-teaching burden of government school teachers, transfers, punishment, universalization, corruption, political interference... Each one of these was cited as a reason for the burden on the school child! The message seemed to be: 'you want to reduce the burden on the child? Then set the system right. Make it work.'

Left me feeling helpless, tied up, unable to think, leave alone capable of acting. Is there no space for specific issues in education? Is it unreasonable to raise them without taking on the entire system? Or are all issues only systemic? And is the only relevant problem of Indian education the dysfunctionality of the system?

Yashpal let everyone say what he would (interestingly, the gathering was predominantly male), only cautioning people to leave time for everyone to speak. The teachers from the Hindi states were all bothered by the tenacious hold of English in education. But there was no particular resonance with the issue of teaching in the dialect rather than in standard Hindi: *Yes, standard Hindi is difficult for children, but this is a must.* What about learning all the facts that they do, all that geography, all that history? *There is a lot of repetition, but they must know all that.* And the maths? *The standard is now a bit too high, and they don't emphasize so much on tables. When we were young we knew all the tables, both addition and multiplication, and we also for 1/4, and 1/8, and 1/2. Now they don't know the basics. And in language there isn't any emphasis on the varnamala anymore, or on handwriting. This makes it difficult for the children later.* What about science? *We are not able to conduct practicals, we don't have the time or equipment. Also the language is too tough. And books also give wrong information, and though we write asking them to change it, they don't bother. What can we do? we are forced to teach wrong things. Why don't you change it? We don't have permission to.*

There were teachers from a few private schools as well. They too were defensive and a bit complacent about what they teach their children. They claim they are thorough and give a lot of practice so that children can learn a lot. And of course they all claim that they use the 'play-way' method (whatever that is) and innovative techniques to make learning 'fun'. The problems in school come later, with exams. The class XII physics books, they claim, are too tough. And competitive entrance exams put an inordinate load on children.

The meeting went on for two days. NCERT provides rather lavish lunches. A few things became clear. Teachers do not feel they have any control over what they are to teach, or what children have to learn. They don't believe they are consulted in matters of textbook preparation. (But then they also don't believe they have much to offer, it being the domain of experts.) The entrance exams to the IITs and medical colleges puts a lot of pressure on school children. The committee has now decided that, apart from teachers, it should also meet textbook writers and publishers, and those who conduct the entrance exams for engineering and medical courses. Going to be more interesting than I thought.

*love,
P.*

Delhi, 8 July 1992

Dear Radha,

The monsoon hasn't reached Delhi yet and it is hot and sultry. Clouds and no rain. I am quite pleased about travelling out to Trivandrum to meet the monsoon. Surely it must be raining everywhere outside Delhi. I have bought myself a new pair of synthetic slippers – expensive, but rainworthy, and I've packed my raincoat and umbrella.

Trivandrum, 15 July

No rain! The train compartment was packed. The weather stayed hot and sultry all through. Clouds, but no rain. The train entered Kerala in the morning – the miracle state in education: lush greenery – with its neat villages, all along the train tracks, and hosts of commuters quietly boarding and leaving the train. Everyone carries an umbrella. Most people wear hawaii chappals. The skies are cloud-covered. Only drizzles, no rain.

The guest house we're staying in is super. On a cliff by the sea at Kovalam. All the rooms have a breathtaking view. The skies are grey, overcast with dark clouds. Dr. Kashyap was very surprised that I had arrived in good shape by train. Away from Delhi, he seems quite cheerful and informal. Yashpal is staying at the ISRO guest house at Thumba. In spite of all the important administrative positions he has held, I think in his heart he is still a scientist.

en route to Pune, 17 July

I'm on this flight to Pune. The last two days in Trivandrum have been quite an experience. We were mostly ensconced in a subterranean, musty, air-conditioned room, with strange acoustics. We couldn't hear each other without speaking into the microphone! Pity we couldn't get any windows to open. The weather outside was gorgeous. The meeting had few teachers – from Karnataka, Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Pondicherry. They were all quite articulate and focused.

Yashpal had invited Parameswaran, an important member of the Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad, to come to the meeting. His whole approach to matters in education was such a contrast to the way school teachers look at things. He challenged the assumptions made about how curricula are meant to be constructed. Beginning with the demand that education must help one understand and act within one's own environment, he made understanding and relevance the yardstick. It almost inevitably led one to consider localized curricula and regional variation, instead of a national or state level curriculum. And a bottom-up rather than top-down setting of learning objectives. To you and me it seems so obvious that this is how it should be, but it isn't so obvious. Different groups have different expectations of education – rather schooling. That leads on to different principles for curricular choices. Anil Sadgopal is right. In his meeting

with the committee in Delhi, he had stated that there is a lack of discourse and clarity on what education is for. We simply assume that we share a consensus on this. But we don't. So we often find ourselves talking at cross-purposes.

Parameswaran's views must have seemed like wild anarchist talk to the teachers. While most of them could appreciate what he was saying, they were not too comfortable with the idea of regional variation. They also felt that this would mean quite a reorientation of existing practices. One teacher flatly refused to explore this possibility, declaring that we have been setting and re-setting the goals of education for too long. But have we really done that? Views have been expressed in policy documents and commission reports: 'Education is for national development', or 'for human development'. 'Universalization is a goal we must achieve'. 'Every Indian must be literate'. Why? Because everybody says so? Because the Constitution says so? Because the World Bank says so? Because literacy is positively correlated with GNP? We've taken too much for granted, and we don't allow ourselves to wonder.

I got the feeling that the teachers believe the initiative should be taken by the state. 'First they should do xyz, then we can do this. First politicians should have a moral code of conduct, first there should be schools for parents, first the exam system should change, first there should' Have we lost the capacity to be moved by our convictions? Must society first reform itself before schools begin to take learning seriously? (Incidentally, this Catch-22 situation reflects the resistance to education change observed by Durkheim, Altabach, Shukla and Bourdieu.)

A meeting had been arranged to meet another activist—the force behind Kerala's library movement. Kerala abounds in indigenous activists. This meeting had a touch of the absurd. Ra, you have to imagine this: we all file into the presence of the Master and are soon seated. Yashpal speaks about the committee's mandate, and asks for his ideas. This is translated into Malayalam by a devotee. Then, after a short pause, the Master gives his reply, which the devotee translates back into English for our benefit: a short autobiographical note, and a few words of encouragement to the committee to continue its good work. Each of us is handed a large red banana. There is silence. I peel my banana and eat it. Everyone gets a little uneasy as the silence stretches. Prof. Gajendra Singh looks as though he'd like to leave and makes some irreverent noises to that effect. We get up to leave. Everyone else still has his banana in his hand and doesn't seem to know what to do with it. Kashyap opens his briefcase and puts it in! Gajendra Singh looks like he wishes it would just disappear. I noticed that he surreptitiously puts it down between the piles of books on one of the tables on our way out.

That evening I stayed back in the town, promising to make my own way back to the guest house. I wandered about the streets and markets. It was too late to visit any museums or the palace. At about 7 pm I went over to the bus stop and waited for a bus to Kovalam. There'd be a bus in half an hour, I was told. An hour passed, and then two. No bus. Every one just waited patiently. 'Shall we go and find out what the matter is?' I asked. 'No, no. Don't go. If the bus comes in the meanwhile, we'll miss it.' 'But can't the others keep it waiting for us?' 'No, no. They won't. Better to just wait.' So we just waited. There was a sudden downpour: rain at last! Everyone crowded into the shelter. At 9:30 a bus arrived and there was a huge scramble to get in. No queue. Somewhat naively, I had expected Kerala to be different, with all the literacy, activism and political awareness; I was surprised.

Kerala's schools don't seem very different from schools anywhere else either. We visited one. Children crowded on benches behind desks. Bright scrubbed faces, hair oiled and combed neatly. Heavy bags. Parameswaran had told us to expect that. He says Kerala's success in education is because parents make sure that their children stay on in school, not because they are doing interesting things. Curriculum load may hold the secret of 'embourgeoisement'.

I had to fly with the committee to Pune: the train would have got me there a day late. Kashyap, perhaps mellowed by my feat of travelling across the country alone and by his own distance from Delhi, did not protest too much. We had a long wait at the airport. Yashpal began speaking of his early forays into

curriculum work with the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Project. Scientists from Delhi University and TIFR were inventing simple, elegant experiments that could be used for learning science in rural schools. He spoke of his meetings with teachers, of the discussions they had, of curriculum change, of the radically different kind of science teaching they made a reality. Kashyap had never heard of HSTP or Eklavya before. He had never dreamt that such an innovation was possible, and that in fact it existed. The excitement of something so radically different, meaningful and powerful was permeating his entire being, and throwing into relief his years of soul-less work. He listened to Yashpal, as one would to a master, almost hanging on every word. Yashpal was a story teller, weaving a tale of the unimaginable. This was a way of being that went beyond the charades which education centres, whether the NCERT or the SCERTs and now the DIETs, engage in. It was as if the opportunity of being able to do something real in education, the possibility of moving beyond rhetoric, filled Kashyap with a radiance, a glow. Was this, I wondered, going to be a turning point in his intellectual life?

Reminds me of an incident at a meeting I attended two years ago at the KFI school at Rajghat. A group of CIET (NCERT) people were meeting there with the KFI-types to discuss ways in which TV can be used to improve the quality of primary education in rural India. (Why with KFI? And what was I doing there?) Any way. After three intensive days of interaction, this innocent, bemused CIET-ian in a trance-like state and the beatific smile of one at the brink of revelation, asks one of the KFI-ians : 'But Madam, what is God?' I could have died laughing.

Love,
P.

Pune, 20 July 1992

Dear Ma,

More ridiculous goings-on. The meeting with teachers was in progress when suddenly a group of well-dressed, middle-class-looking people burst into the room. Rather belligerently they claimed there was a conspiracy by the state officials to keep them out. They were concerned citizens and demanded the right to be heard by the committee!! Yashpal was, of course, only too willing to let them join the meeting. He was especially pleased to learn that one of them was an MBA-type. The problem seems so interlinked with almost every other social issue, maybe some fresh thinking from some unexpected quarter will bring new insights. Maybe these MBA-types have some good, unconventional, synergistic systems solutions to offer. No luck. This one suggested 'dhyani'. (I'm not joking Amma. He really did say that just ten minutes of meditation every day in school would make *the* difference.)

It's a pity state officials hogged up so much time in the meeting, even though Yashpal pointedly said he wanted to hear from teachers about their experiences. These directors and heads just assumed that what they have to say is more important. It's shocking how brazenly one of them claimed that the state curriculum was a load only for low intelligence, mediocre children! The teachers here had some good suggestions – make books more readable by using familiar language, reduce repetitiveness and eliminate poems and stories to which children cannot relate. The SCERT officials interpreted this as teachers diluting standards to make their own job easy!

Love,
P.

p.s. Some heavy rains in Pune.

Dear Ra,

I've taken off from Pune on my own, to return to Delhi via M.P. Yesterday I found myself cycling on the Malwa plateau, from Arlavda to Mankund village, with a group of teachers. The weather was lovely. I felt at home in their company, as though I had been doing this all my life. These teachers are a part of Eklavya's social science and science programmes. The astuteness with which they grasped the issue I was referring to was impressive. They were so much at ease in talking about teaching and learning, suspending all other systemic issues in education, or at least putting them in perspective. Good handwriting doesn't cloud language learning. And a disciplined class isn't equated with good teaching or good learning. Their criticism, whether of the M.P. board or of Eklavya, is sound. The kind one can respond to.

I think the prolonged association of about ten years with Eklavya has made this possible. It seems to take many meetings and several years of association and of action to achieve this ease of communication. So it's hardly surprising that our two-day meetings with teachers rarely get beyond the point of rhetoric. And then many of them, the other teachers we have met, don't seem to have any idea of how things could be different, and what different learning materials could look like. It's as if we are expecting creative thinking in a vacuum; expecting them to somehow pull themselves up by their bootstraps; expecting them to reflect on things that they had never even imagined could be problematic. To them good schooling has never meant good understanding or learning. It has meant instead good grades, good pronunciation, good behaviour.

Yashpal keeps referring to the idea of producing local curricula where each school has its own curriculum. 'Why can't children in a village school in Kerala learn their science from the trees and plants that surround them, while children in Madhya Pradesh study the flora around their own village?' Most teachers haven't even understood what he is talking about. They react to it pretty much the way NCERT does, with fear, and by trivializing it: 'How can different things be taught in different places?' It's as if standardization and uniformity are desirable for their own sake. But why should they be? The idea of variation seems too far ahead of what the system is ready for. Left to themselves to produce such curricula, I suspect they would generate a million copies of the NCERT programme. Almost none of these teachers have thought about learning. Against this, Yashpal's idea seems absurdly anarchist, ahead of its time. Unfortunately it gets dismissed as a silly suggestion. I wish people would instead take it seriously and assimilate its implications.

I visited a DIET near Dewas. The principal has worked with Eklavya for a long time. His staff is very enthusiastic, but seems to have no clue of what is to be done, of how education should be invigorated. He has been able to get them all to take up some projects, making materials for more effective and creative teaching and learning. He sheepishly acknowledges that their products are not too good. Actually they are pathetic. For instance, a unit prepared to teach the use of some technicality of grammar- the past participle or something. This unit has been made 'interesting' for children by drawing pictures to illustrate each sentence!! Here learning theory hasn't gone beyond the gut feeling that children like drawings and pictures, so use them to get them interested! Then there was this teacher in Delhi who said he used innovative ways of teaching historical facts: he composed them into couplets with tunes. The result was magical. Children now loved singing them, and also remembered them! (These are not unlike the incompatible stimulation effect of habit formation in Guthrie's learning theory based on Pavlovian conditioning – an example of how imaginative teachers can stimulate their students.)

And there was this other gentleman at another DIET I visited, who went on and on in a loud voice about how school curricula must be loaded, otherwise we would forever remain a third world country. My head hurts when I begin to think of all the DIETs in the country that are full of such human resources, so that the ministry can claim it has done its bit for elementary education. The utter uselessness of what these

institutions will produce is paralysing. What good does it do to replicate a model, or an institution, without consideration of sustainability or quality?

love,
P

Calcutta, 1 August 1992 – No rain.

Dear Amma,

The Rajdhani is a strange train. I was put into a little air-conditioned capsule and dragged through the Gangetic plain from Delhi to Calcutta without feeling the air or dust of U.P. and Bihar. Didn't feel like an Indian train journey. Didn't like it.

People in Calcutta don't smile. Maybe the weather has got them down. It should have been pouring. Instead it's muggy and sweaty. Prof. Yashpal has taken ill, so he couldn't come for this meeting. The others members are here.

Again, these teachers feel the prescribed syllabus and content of textbooks cannot be touched, having been 'rationally' determined by considerations like the 'knowledge explosion', and needs of the nation. They assume that the curriculum is aimed at gearing us up for the 21st century, to make sure we don't get left behind. They suggest ways of coping – better inspection, better training of teachers, changing exams, more material funding.... Prof. Singh tried to get them to speak about innovative ways they may have devised to make teaching successful in spite of the system. But for many of them, an admission that children don't learn the prescribed things implies they themselves are bad teachers, not that the things they have to teach are unlearnable. As elsewhere, a number of state officials decided to come though this wasn't meant to be a forum to listen to officialese, but to hear teachers. The problem is that in the presence of higher-ups, teachers also switch to officialese.

Still, I've heard two new points of view here. One comes from a Bihari teacher who says children find textbooks boring and school monotonous! Would you believe it, she is the first person to say this about textbooks. She was quite categorical that they were not tough, but boring. It's true. The triviality of observations in primary school books, in the misguided belief that 'ordinary is simple', makes them so banal and uninteresting. The other is an observation about history textbooks. Amid loud complaints from teachers that particularly history books in Bengal are getting too voluminous, one person observed that even if they are long, books which establish links between events are better than those that don't. In fact, by being too brief and terse, short books become quite difficult. Mechanical solutions like restricting the number of pages in a book cannot tackle the problem of a heavy load.

I think I visited Thatha's old house in Uttar Para. That was quite an adventure too. I'll tell you more about it once I have had the photographs developed.

love,
P.

Delhi, 13 September 1992

Ra,

I'm setting off for a meeting in Bhopal, being organized by Eklavya, so the committee can meet non-government agencies working in education, to improve the quality of curricular transactions – that's the

'education' word for teaching and learning. Eklavya is under a bit of a cloud. The BJP government in M.P. has ordered its Social Science and Prashika programmes to close down, after a rather spurious evaluation by a group of teachers and some other 'experts'. It's a shame that political correctness won't allow us to question the credentials of this team openly. Eklavya seems to have allowed itself to be co-opted into the state's charades. Now they are concerned these 'experts' may have recommended that the science programme also be disbanded. Quite a crisis for them and they are in a bit of a panic about what to do. If the education programmes close down, their *raison d'être* would cease to exist. But how does one save the programmes? Should they create a *halla* and mobilize public opinion, making it impossible for the government to take this step? Doesn't seem they will go this way. They seem to have explored talking with the BJP supremos! It's really ridiculous that one has to go to go this extent simply to ensure that an innovative effort is not eliminated from the system. Leaves one with little energy to invest in being innovative. Why are state officials so pig-headed and unimaginative about letting anything creative and innovative happen in education? Why do they feel so threatened?

In the middle of this we're going off to Bhopal. I'm not telling Amma and Appa all this because they'll worry and will probably think I'm just asking for trouble – getting into politically sensitive stuff. It will confirm their theory that anything different from the norm is dangerous.

16 September.

Continuing after the one day meeting in Bhopal. I saw the committee in a new state of energy. Meeting people who have actually made a difference in the quality of learning and are working with the 'grassroots', not exclusive schools, seems to have invigorated the committee, and given it a sense that things can be different. The change in G. Chaudhuri is particularly marked. So far, he was convinced that the real problem of rural schools was getting them to function, and that making learning meaningful was too abstract in this context. I think he feels differently now

There was much gossip about Eklavya's present predicament and the political undercurrents that had crept into the meeting. The M.P. state education officials who had been invited cried off, claiming some prior engagement. They seemed to think this meeting was politically motivated. There was also gossip about Prof. Kamal Dev's absence. Was he at the brink of joining some BJP advisory panel on education? Anil Sadgopal's name came up as a possible player in the present scenario. Not surprisingly, it was shot down as a non-entity as far as current education activism is concerned!

It felt strange hearing the Eklavya folk hold forth on the history and work of Eklavya. I guess it's because I'm so familiar with it, that it never ceases to surprise me there are people who have been connected with education for decades and who haven't even an inkling of the existence of this giant innovative effort. There's virtually no literature available about this programme and all information about it has to be gathered through conversations.

It ended up sounding a bit rhetorical, simplified and romantic. An uninitiated listener could have easily reduced the effort and all its nuances to the slogan 'learning by doing', rather than to appreciate why such a slogan, or any slogan, cannot characterize learning.

Rohit Dhankar spoke about Digantar and the concept of learning it is based on. This is a group of schools near Jaipur, independent of the formal system. He was more careful about preventing his description and philosophy from getting trapped by catch phrases. It wasn't till he said it that I realised how important the awareness is of what you *cannot* achieve through education. Alaripu is an organization full of well-meaning concern to make school come alive with theatre and craft. They seemed concerned about how to make sustained interventions.

58 There were queries from the committee if such work – curriculum development and teacher training – was replicable. Yes, of course. Just give people a chance. In Pune we had met Maxine-ben who was keen on retraining teachers with better language pedagogy, but she wasn't permitted. Dhankar wanted to interact

with government teachers, but it hasn't been permitted yet. Dr. Kalbag at Pabal was keen on extending his rural technology course to cover more schools, but the state has not shown any interest. When the Alaripu people came into MCD schools, the teachers gave them a class and took a break. They didn't stay with them to learn. After all they would go through the twenty-one day training when they needed to cross their efficiency bar.

It was beginning to sound like the state is the villain of the piece. One of the Eklayya-jtes does take this line. He recommended that NGOs be allowed to set up a parallel education Raj. (Of course in their lingo the word is 'network' – 'the NGOs must network') When the talk gets into this mode, it usually sounds just provocative, silly and wild. I don't think the committee is going to be taken in by that. In fact what we need is for some one to do a Gorbachev on the NCERT.

I'm going to make another trip to Hoshangabad in a few days. At last Prashika has plans of documenting its experiences. High time these things were written about.

*love,
P.*

Delhi, October 1992

Dear Ra,

The last few days I encountered more upper class mavericks. We seem to be meeting them in the hope that one of them will have something to say that will 'solve the whole problem' once and for all. There was this Delhi-based biologist, reputed to be an iconoclast. Seemed quite preoccupied with his daughter's schooling and all the absurdities he had to encounter in her education. 'Radical action is the need of the hour!'

We met some scientists who had been involved with producing textbooks for the NCERT. They were asked about the manner in which textbook writing proceeds, and more specifically about why the class ix to xii science books their team produced were so tough, and met with so much resistance. They began with an invocation to C.N.R. Rao, and his concern over the improvement of the quality of science textbooks and materials in the country. They were quite apologetic about having created such a controversy with the books they had produced. I don't agree that these books are all bad. All right, so they are not very user-friendly, but they are interesting and challenging. I didn't express this opinion though. Others voiced the assessment of teachers and parents that the books are too tough. How could a group of scientists who took on the task of writing books produce something that was so insensitive of its users – the teachers and students?

I'm sure the group has been grilled over these issues many times. They didn't sound like chauvinistic scientists who discount the opinions of practising teachers. They had a lot to say about how ad hoc the process of textbook writing is. They had suggested a 'package' – textbook, teacher's guide, workbook and additional readings. It was cut down to just textbook. The deadlines set were unrealistic and politically controlled. All materials were discussed with teachers, but these meetings were useless. There wasn't enough time. Teachers were too awed by the scientists and didn't seem to feel confident or competent to make any comments. The materials too were given to them at the meeting, so they had no time to go through and reflect on them. All official participation of teachers in textbook writing exercises probably proceeds like this. They are there just to lend legitimacy and to counter criticisms on the lack of teacher involvement.

The conversation got interesting as they began to talk about what they had originally conceptualized for the curriculum. They talked about making curricula relevant to local conditions, and rooted in local issues and knowledge. There was mention of a school in Bangalore that some nsc people had begun for

their children, and what had been put into the curriculum. Yashpal kept asking, how do we do this on a national scale? How do we 'solve the problem' for the entire country? The solution seems a chimera, I observed to Dr. Gajendra Singh who replied that ontologically solutions belong to fairy tales.

We also met a senior IIT professor, and he was asked: 'Why do the IIT/medical entrance tests need to be so tough? Why do they always have to be higher than the current XII class syllabus?' Aren't they responsible for creating a lot of pressure on class XII students, a pressure that is unwarranted?

The line he took was totally unexpected. He said he thought there was nothing at all wrong with the IITs or their entrance. When asked if the IIT engineering programmes are relevant in the Indian context, this professor rather scathingly declared that IIT graduates have no option but to think of leaving the country and not returning! 'We aren't able to provide even the basic infrastructural facilities they need, he claimed, like uninterrupted power supply! Sounded a lot like Aunt Vinita rationalizing her children's decision to go abroad to study, and preparing for the eventuality of their not returning. Also sounded like 'We at IIT don't think we should change anything we're doing. If you don't think it's good, that's your problem!' An official from the CBSE too met the committee. Didn't have much to say about the reasons for their syllabi and conduct of exams. They don't seem to reflect. Just take it all for granted.

One of my senior profs with a dour historical perspective of education has also met the committee. Said that all previous committees have tried to address these issues, but none has made a difference. I think this is not quite true. Even though teaching-learning has been commented upon by other committees, it has never been their focus. They have all had to attend to the 'whole system'. He sounded a bit cynical. Sometimes I think sociologists, historians and philosophers analyze problematic situations to the point of reducing themselves to inaction. Better to retain the 'stupid reductionist' simplicity of the scientist.

Did I tell you about the meeting we had with textbook publishers? Private publishers that is. The ones who tend to produce textbooks full of trivia and information that private school teachers make children memorize. I was surprised they even accepted the invitation to come. They didn't have much to say. Pointed to the NCERT and the market for setting the standards

love,
P.

Delhi, 1 November 1992

Dear Ma,

I finally gave in my report on the textbooks from various parts of the country. With a few important exceptions, I found them to be dense, containing too much information that is poorly elaborated, repetitive, and most of all moralistic and boring, particularly in the early years. And its amazing how almost all the states have emulated the NCERT. Even though technically they can, they don't want to do things differently! (And when they do, it's usually worse.) I now have this treasury of textbooks from several states of the country.

The members of the committee are meeting to work on writing up the report. I think there is more agreement now that the load of non-comprehension does exist, though the scope of the committee's report and its recommendations will have to be worked out. I'm getting back to my Ph.D. and will begin my field work soon.

love,
P.

Learning to Change

Books

IMAGE, IDEOLOGY AND INEQUALITY: Cultural Domination, Hegemony and Schooling in India by Timothy J. Scrase. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1993

POST-COLONIAL societies have never had too many illusions about the ideological function of education. From Wood's infamous dispatch of 1854, which sought to create a class with English tastes and Indian colour via education, to the New Education Policy of 1986 which more reasonably reminds us that 'Every country develops its system of education to express and promote its unique socio-cultural identity', we are constantly reminded of the acculturating and signifying function of education.

Less explicit, however, has been an awareness of the precise working of this role. With a few exceptions, much of the educational sociology of the '60s and '70s has been in the empiricist mode, concentrating on statistics of literacy, enrolment and retention. While a great deal of work has been done in the West to marry the distinct disciplines of pedagogic practice and educational sociology, in India the link between classroom experience and social culture has been little explored. A significant departure was in a study of Indian textbooks by Krishna Kumar, in which he pointed to the preponderance of symbols of societal and adult authority and a corresponding marginalisation of children and their world. Now in this work by Scrase, we have a study of social structuring as it occurs through the English textbooks used in schools in Bengal.

Bengal is of course a good state to choose: English has for many years had an uneasy status in this state, as was evident in the Marxist government's decision to ban the teaching of English in primary schools. The fact that this ban was recently rescinded only points to the complex status of English in India, something which Delhi's Education Minister, Sahib Singh Verma recently found to his cost. The precise function of English within the school education system has resisted a workable definition even by the various education commissions set up after Independence.

Scrase begins his study by acknowledging the role of education in structuring identity. Drawing on Gramsci, Raymond Williams and Bourdieu he outlines the nature of hegemony, of culture and cultural capital in reifying a specific notion of order, authority and class. Through a meticulous examination of signs and symbols, Scrase argues that conceptions of the real in Bengal textbooks are defined by bhadrak culture which retains a firm stranglehold on

the education system. Thus he finds that in the textbooks the middle class is constantly portrayed favourably in nurturant roles such as teachers, nurses or doctors. On the other hand, subalterns are often lazy, unintelligent but content. While the social experience of subaltern classes is defined by their labour, the middle class has a much wider arena of social experience. Similarly, cultural assumptions are bhadrak constructions: in the illustrations, dress is portrayed as naturally being western or following the style of the Indian middle class. Families tend to be nuclear, gender assumptions are unproblematically patriarchal and female domestic labour is taken for granted. The conceptualisation of time follows common myth in suggesting that rural existence is timeless while urban existence is set in the present.

Scrase points to the significance of what is excluded as much as what is included. There is, for instance, no example of child labour, none of unemployment, no hint of floods or droughts: the hardship of rural existence is entirely ignored. While a variety of bourgeois occupations are mentioned – mill owners, rich businessmen, plantation owners – there is no corresponding diversity in the portrayal of rural occupations.

In arguing for the pivotal role of the middle classes in shaping the structure of education in India, Scrase usefully surveys the various textbook controversies which have dotted the educational history of the past four decades. From the Jan Sangh prompted debates and the rewriting of the history textbooks during the Morarji Desai government to the Sahaj Path controversy in Bengal, Scrase points out that they have all been firmly rooted in the sphere of politics rather than pedagogy. This he sees as a manifestation of a middle class struggle to maintain a hidden agenda of control and influence.

There is certainly an important truth in this argument which has been under-explored in the context of Indian education. Its special significance lies in its focus on the English curriculum which functions as a signifier of the myriad conflicts of class and culture in India. However, the very validity of this proposition handicaps the overall argument. In its anxiety to stand up to scrutiny, the work tends to flatten some of the complexity of the issues raised.

The identification of the middle class as the villain of the piece obscures the complexity of middle class constitution. It is difficult to locate an over-arching and single ideology within the middle class as Scrase does. Bhadrak culture incorporates a western elite sensibility but equally

a regional Marxist one. Radical social reform for instance, also constitutes one strand of middle class ideology. The sweeping assumptions which underlie Scrase's arguments make some of his readings suspect. His assertion for example, that the texts show situations of bravery for subalterns and not for the middle class because it is assumed that the middle class already and invariably possess courage, is surely quite insubstantial: it could equally be argued that such examples of courage characterise the heroic image of the working class found in much Marxist writing.

The problem with the argument, however, is more fundamental than one of interpretation. While delineating the hegemonic control of the middle class, Scrase discards the possibility of any resistance to its power. His assertion that acquiescence to the system is ensured by the symbiotic relationship between degrees and jobs and the restricted nature of the employment-market, is once again too flat. As Bourdieu has argued, resistance to hegemonic control takes a number of forms, often leads to a gradual and nearly imperceptible transformation of an existing structure. The degree of indiscipline and student boredom in schools (remarked on with concern by every education commission since 1952) is one instance of resistance. Many students interviewed in schools have dismissed the English class as irrelevant to their needs and lives, the mushrooming of coaching institutions for English, however, suggests that it is not English per se which is resisted or irrelevant but the English curriculum taught in schools. Similarly the exclusive status of English is increasingly challenged by the emerging rural elite – the elite which was for instance, powerful enough to persuade the Rajiv Gandhi government to establish Navodaya Vidyalayas. The signifiers of middle class values are not necessarily the incontestable ideals that Scrase suggests.

Many of the problems with Scrase's arguments then, are problems of excess. Perhaps a closer examination of classroom transaction would have enabled a more nuanced reading of the structures of power as they function within the education system: a pointer to the need to bridge the gap between those who are involved in the practice of teaching and those who reflect theoretically on the process.

Shalini Advani

PRASHIKA: Eklavya's Innovative Experiment in Primary Education. Ratna Sagar, Delhi, 1994.

THE gay abandon and glee with which most children rush out of classrooms and the school gate after the last bell of the day, illustrate how repressive the school experience usually is. The speed with which the bell miraculously transforms the 'dull, dim-witted, slow child' into a bright, care-free person, must make the most casual observer realise that something is the matter with our school system. What is it

about schools that changes bright, creative, curious five and six year old children into listless, frightened, slow twelve year olds? Why, even after five years of primary school, are twelve year olds unable to express themselves adequately, coherently or confidently, or read and comprehend simple texts on their own?

It was the search for answers and solutions that spurred on a group of individuals to develop Prashika – *Prathamik Shiksha Karyakram*. Developed by a varied group of people – children, teachers, researchers, activists, academics – Prashika has not only explored the problems plaguing the education system, it has gone much further and developed workable strategies, methods and means to make the entire schooling experience exciting and relevant for both students and teachers.

Prashika is the result of a nine-year effort by a committed, dedicated group of people, assisted over the years by numerous others, whose sole motivation has been to change the schooling experience in rural schools. And this at no great financial cost or without any major structural changes in the school system. Prashika is a part of the ongoing programmes that Ekalavya, a Madhya Pradesh based voluntary organisation, engaged in among a range of activities devised to promote socially relevant education.

This book records the methods, means, problems, issues and debates which the group wrestled with while evolving the programme. Today, this has been adopted by 25 schools in rural Madhya Pradesh.

To begin with a series of field surveys and psychological studies were conducted to establish the learning capacities and existing skills of the children. State curriculum was analysed to try and understand why students were failing poorly. The findings were neither unknown nor unexpected. Right from the early school years, the state curriculum alienates children from their environment. The language used in the texts further distances the child, as it is used and taught in an isolated and de-contextualised manner. The young child is burdened with learning expectations far in advance of his/her cognitive ability.

Seeking to change all this, Prashika lays down the aims and objectives, assumptions and principles and the debates which still continue, as the rationale behind the choices it made in formulating an alternative curriculum. The alternative curriculum for classes I-V in language, mathematics and environment, covers the entire range of skills a child needs, not only for the years of schooling but for life. And this is probably Prashika's single greatest contribution.

Where Prashika departs from the conventional curriculum is in presenting 'end-levels' as processes and activities, rather than as items of information and knowledge. In fact there is no expectation that children "will know that ...". Prashika begins with what the child has learnt and knows about his/her immediate environment, continues to validate it and builds on it.

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Diary of a Decade of Agony

Avinash Dharmadhikari

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Diary of a Decade of Agony is a translation of Marathi original *Aswastha Dashakachi Diari*. The book is an Indian Panorama with the various people the author encountered in his travels — from peasants in cyclone-hit Andhra Pradesh, to student leaders in Assam, to dissidents in Punjab and Kashmir, anti-reservationists in Gujarat, to fundamentalists in Aligarh and Ayodhya.

Particularly notable are the author's thoughts and comments and musings of every encounter he describes. This gives the reader a sense of being swept up and involved in the lives of India's millions.

Politics of Modern Maharashtra

V.M. Sirsikar

Rs 260.00

This is a study of the politics of Maharashtra beginning with 1960 and ending in 1990. It is not a traditional study of institutions, but it is an effort to understand the political reality through a study of political culture. Who governs Maharashtra is a matter of concern for all of us. The study tries to throw light on this issue. The role of the sugar lobby, of Dalit Panthers, Shiv Sena and the RSS, and Shetkari Sanghatana has been examined.



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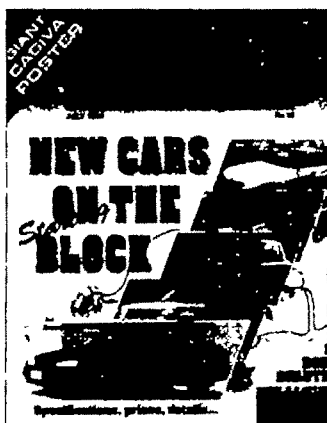
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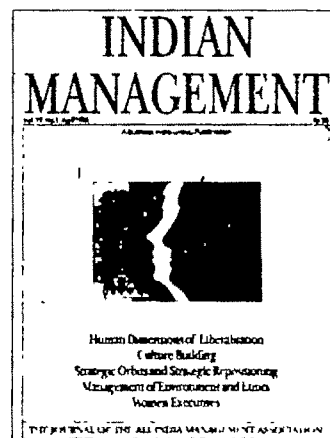
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What Prashika proposes in its curriculum has been proposed many times the world over. So in a sense its ingredients are not path-breaking or original. Its relevance lies in the fact that it demonstrates what can be done. Prashika has succeeded in putting its progressive ideas into action. *Khushi Khushi*, a series of text-cum-workbooks with their rich and varied content of pictures, songs, poems and stories have transformed the learning process making it far more encouraging and less threatening.

Prashika's uniqueness and relevance lies in it not being prescriptive. It advocates no single 'correct method'. Though designed primarily for rural schools, it can be adapted for use in any kind of school.

Teacher Training (or Orientation as they prefer to term it) has been its other major contribution. The models it has developed for training teachers attempts to rid the teacher of conventional ideas and inhibitions and helps her/him become a participant in the learning experience being enacted in classrooms. Prashika demands that the teacher be creative and resourceful and to a large extent the success of the programme is dependent on this. That teachers can be both creative and resourceful is not in doubt. However, one has to remember that many an innovative and constructive programme has failed to inspire unmotivated and non-creative teachers.

The authors of Prashika have stated that this monograph is only the first in a series which will eventually comprise seven monographs on different aspects of the programme. If the first is anything to go by, the series would be a welcome addition to the woefully inadequate literature on Indian education.

Snehlata Gupta

CASTE, CLASS AND EDUCATION: Politics of the Capitation Fee Phenomenon in Karnataka
by Rekha Kaul. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1993.

THIS is a well-researched and neatly written book in an area which despite the public attention it has drawn, is still under-researched. The phenomenon of charging a capitation fee needs to be examined afresh as one of the possible alternatives to the privatizing of higher education in India, particularly for professional degrees in engineering, medicine and management.

The author concentrates on the relationship that such a practice has with the politics of caste, class and power in Karnataka. But her treatment of the subject derives a new relevance in the context of the mood of privatization now running through practically every segment of Indian economy and society. A fresh look at this phenomenon along with numerous sets of data and a select bibliography makes the book a valuable source of reference to all students of regional development, history, politics, sociology, social psychology and economics and to anyone seriously inter-

ested in exploring the organizational structure behind the operation of such colleges. Moreover, the book is an important anthology of the socio-economic development of contemporary Karnataka.

Kaul has analyzed the complex character of this practice and laid bare the interplay of various social, economic and political factors behind the emergence and growth of colleges that charge a capitation fee. The practice, which in principle is based on the capitalized value of fixed and variable costs per capita, is in reality governed today by the forces of demand and supply. It exploits the ignorance of the buyer and indifference of the seller. Kaul has shown how, for example, the rich peasants and landlords belonging to the dominant intermediate castes in Karnataka – the Vokkaliga and Lingayat – exercised their influence in setting up such colleges. Thus, she has highlighted important sociological questions like 'Can the capitation fee phenomenon be viewed as a possible channel of mobility for the backward and underprivileged section?' (p. 242). If so, then such institutions must be spheres of caste competition and conflict where different interest groups vie with one another to set up an engineering or medical college.

Similarly, the ability of a political or caste leader to secure a college for his area gave him social prestige and a captive vote bank. Many such leaders also relied on financial support from these capitation fee colleges during elections (p. 243). The book thus depicts how such colleges acted as the hub of a nexus between social, political and economic forces in Karnataka and reveals the details of the well-known and obvious connections between education and power politics in India.

However, when we view the capitation fee phenomenon as an emerging alternative means of financing higher education we must look beyond certain obvious relationships. For example, it is possible to shift from the persistent theme of inequality that Kaul has talked about and concentrate on the possible effects on the moral behaviour of future generations of skilled and trained manpower. Kaul has discussed the implications of this in terms of inequalities and the elitist base of the education system. She concludes that not only has this system reproduced dominant structures, it has been anti-secular and has led to a lowering of educational standards. What also needs to be highlighted is that these developments were not intrinsically rooted in the concept of capitation fee itself but in the more pervasive and general motives of the caste and class leaders, the politicians and the profiteering entrepreneurs. The charging of a capitation fee alone was not responsible for their motives and behaviour but were also the result of the indifference of the state, which failed to distance education from politics.

There is also the question of the long-term negative effect of this practice on the socio-economic behaviour of future generations of doctors and engineers trained in these

colleges. Kaul's passing reference to a large number of student respondents stating that their prime objective was to first 'make good the amount' (p.257) they had spent on their education as capitation fee provides an important clue to a possible moral fallout of this issue

To counter these tendencies, a strong consumer resistance through widening the scope of the Consumer's Protection Act on the one hand and a consolidation of public action on the other is required. To save themselves from being priced out, the capitation fee colleges must remember that with the opening up of socialist economies alternative venues, like medicine and engineering in Russia, have become available to Indian students. Such colleges charge a considerably lower tuition fee and are free of bureaucratic hassles. So far as the standards of this alternative are concerned, although it is too early to conclude decisively, Russia still has the infrastructure and experience in science and technology to provide serious competition to the monopoly of capitation fee education in India. This opens up many possibilities worth considering when reflecting on the actual and potential alternatives in education in India today

Binod Khadria

SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INDIA The Regional Dimension by Moonis Raza, Aijazuddin Ahmad and S.C. Nuna. National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, Delhi, 1990.

IT IS over a year since Moonis Raza passed away and almost 50 since the reviewer first knew him. Therefore what might be missing in terms of 'objectivity' in what follows should, hopefully, be made up by understanding

Moonis Raza's is the familiar trajectory of the middle class youth of the 1940s, from a scientific, rational and intensely anti-imperialist nationalist-universalist outlook, to a participation in the struggle for freedom and socialism, to a commitment to the post-Independence Nehruvian (and later even Indira) state. No particular stream of the intellectual or political legacy of the pre-Independence heritage is accepted or rejected in its entirety. Raza was no exception to this evolutionary spiral. In intellectual terms, Moonis Raza, like several of our intelligentsia, did not accept today's new 'scientific-rational' worldview, questioning the intellectual development of the heritage of Enlightenment

His appreciation of literature and poetry and his recognition of the diversity in language and culture, did not interact (or as he would put it, interfere) with his scientific-rational outlook. As a consequence, and also on account of a commitment to the pan-Indian state, he never openly stated the failure of Actually Existing Socialism to deliver equity. Neither did he use Marxism as originally understood to explain the world; the understanding of class as basic cat-

egory of analysis was in fact given up. Equality-equity were increasingly sought to be delivered via moves for ethnic, rural-urban, caste- and regional equalisation. (Just as gender, in itself most legitimate, is sought to be used by some for a similar purpose today). This digression from Marxism coincided with the interests of the contemporary Indian state and converged with views of liberal thinkers like J. P. Naik who, just a decade ago, would have erased not only class but any inequity of the Indian state from their writings. But by the 1970s, they had discovered the 'coefficient of inequality' – and with it some of the inequity of India.

The geographer in Moonis saheb and his associate Aijazuddin assisted by statistician S. C. Nuna have produced this comprehensive study. It is quantitative to a degree which represents the somewhat simplistic methodological stance of those rational scientific academics who, inspired by Enlightenment, declined to consider other methodological positions inspired by the anthropologists' *verstehen*, the psychologists' introspection or the literary imagination because these were not 'objective', 'scientific' or even rational. (Felt realities were better left to literature or life as they interfered with academic understanding!) The excesses of post-modernism or even the dominance and neo-colonialist implications of modernisation theories could easily be cited, in this view, as inevitable consequences of departure from 'science'. Hence Moonis Raza, like others of this orientation, increasingly turned to quantification, even more sophisticated if that were possible, and to deeper searches, more meticulously conducted, for 'data'. This volume is no disappointment from that point of view.

This broad characterisation of either the late Professor Raza or this volume is perhaps an overstatement, for there is an underlying theory – that of colonial under-development. The view that colonialism was a moderniser is contested. It is pointed out that the building up of enclaves in a hierarchically ordered chain of exploitation – through mainly urban aggregations at the apex, plantation areas, captive mining areas and other mining areas serving them – were instruments in the process which were later succeeded by green revolution areas, areas of uncertain water supply and drought-prone areas in similar situations. Even within these satellite zones, satellite urban centres and areas of 'submarginal' existence can be identified.

Similarly, there is the view that education under colonialism was limited to a minuscule proportion, oriented to serving colonial needs concentrated around port cities and pyramidal in its structure. Thus a strategy directed towards reversing this situation for a modern independent economy is advocated. In this perspective, the regional variations of spread, extent, pyramid, gender disparity as well as socio-economic (mal)-distribution are extensively, intensively and clearly presented through maps (116), charts and bar grams (9-12) and tables (128), and other appendi-

ces (207). Although gender is not a major focus, it is paid adequate attention through male and female enrolment, dropout, 'accessibility' (a rather awkward term whose sense would be nearer 'access') and by portraying a school-girl on the dust jacket. A similar treatment of the scheduled castes is visible. A monumental amount of work was obviously involved in presenting district-wise and region-wise breakdowns

The last chapter, understandably, is on equity, *not* equality, even though Engels and A.R. Desai figure in the references. It mainly describes inequities of caste and gender. Moonis Raza and his associates here do little better perhaps than the 'more progressive' and theoretical scholars in education who have followed them in the last decade. Full of Gramsci, Gandhi, Dewey and anthropologically or pedagogically informed critiques, the works of these younger scholars present a more acceptable and 'radical' modern phase of educational apologia of the ruling establishment. They too omit hunger and class as the basis of educational deprivation, as does this Moonis Raza et al study. If one overlooks this basic limitation, one cannot but admire it as a basis for a critique of the present and for formulation of strategies for major social and educational action.

S. Shukla

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION IN INDIA edited by Krishna Kumar. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1993.

A COLLECTION of papers presented in a seminar does not always translate into a coherent book. This edited volume of papers is no exception. It is uneven and does not hold together despite the gallant efforts of the editor to weave them together in his excellent introduction. In fact, it is his introduction that compels the reader to persevere.

There is a dearth of well-researched books and papers that capture the dismal state of primary education in India and the predicament of a vast population that would happily plunge into meaningful education, given the opportunity. As the editor admits, meaningful education has eluded us for decades. Moreover, education means different things. Narendra Singh puts it succinctly when he says: 'Broadly understood education is a process through which every society seeks to perpetuate itself by making its young internalise its values and mores. Formal school is only a minor component – a sub-process...' Others perceive education as a means to acquire a critical consciousness that enables people to question, seek answers and act.

Shukla explores the implication of a democratic value system on education and the importance of a truly democratic education. He draws upon the pioneering work of Dewey and argues for the enlargement of the role of the school from mere learning of literacy and numeracy to the moulding of

values, habits and personalities. It is this 'power' of formal education that led to a highly polarized debate on the Bengal Secondary Education Bill. Poromesh Acharya's essay on 'Education and Communal Politics in Bengal: a case study' analyses the roots of communalism in Bengal.

Malavika Karlekar's insightful essay explores the long debate on the difference and inequality among people and between men and women. Notwithstanding a century long debate, even today the education establishment and the population lobby argues for women's education as a means to reduce fertility and ensure good child-rearing practices. Karlekar's critique of such policy leads us to recognise the inherent value of education as an equalizing force. She compares the 1984 report of the Commission for Planning of Higher Education in West Bengal with Wood's Educational Dispatch of 1854. Ironically, both these historic documents argue for home science education for girls '... to rebuild homes consistently with the demands of modern life, teach to create an atmosphere of peace, happiness and moral and spiritual well-being of the family.' Her narrative of Karlashashini, an 'educated' nineteenth century woman, captures the predicament of women even in the present day. Karlekar's is one of the best essays in the collection.

Iain's essay 'Education, a linguistic impasse' is tough reading. She outlines four sets of analysis of the present situation in education and people's response to it. The first is a cynical response which believes nothing short of total change can remedy the situation. The second is one of hope where there is a firm belief that efficient management, understanding constraints and adopting a problem-solving mode could make a dent. The third is the response of the 'radical-activists' who see educational problems as a subset of the larger political and economic situation and calls for a struggle against the larger system. The fourth is the author's own view and argues that the problem is really a linguistic impasse. 'This view emphasizes the fact that thought not only needs language for expression but also gets moulded by the language it employs. To be meaningful words have to be related to experience.' She concludes with a call to get rid of dead-wood in the form of oft-repeated and meaningless words and an end to using them as categories of analysis. 'A shift in language would ensure not only cleaner thought but also effective thought,' she holds.

Anita Rampal's delightful piece raises important pedagogic issues especially in the transaction of knowledge in a manner that it relates to the immediate environment of children and promotes experiential learning. Except for Rampal, no one has even touched upon the predicament of the teacher who has been relegated to the bottom of the professional ladder with little social recognition or respect – leading to a very low self-image which hampers learning. How can a person who has ceased to learn ever teach?

Most of the essays have interesting ideas that could grow into valuable research and documentation. If one persists and ploughs through the book one would be

rewarded with some interesting ideas. Perhaps that is what we all look for in a collection of essays that really does not hang together.

Vimala Ramachandran

HOME AWAY FROM HOME. Family Day Care in Bombay by Vrinda Dutta. (All monographs published by the M S. Swaminathan Foundation, Madras, 1995)

IN SIGHT - ON SITE. Day Care for Construction Workers' Children: Mobile Creches, Delhi by Margaret Khalakdina.

FOR THE SAKE OF THE CHILDREN. NGO-Government in Child Care - Urmul Trust, Bajju by Kashyap Mankodi.

LITTLE SCHOOL ON THE HILL. Child Education in Community Development, SIDH, Mussoorie by Vasudha Joshi

THE Suraksha series have come as a breath of fresh air on the scene of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in India. While the scientific study of the child in our country is at least four decades old, the focus on the young child has gained significance primarily due to the dedicated efforts of a handful of voluntary organizations in the last twenty years or so. The M S. Swaminathan Research Foundation is to be congratulated for initiating the process of preparing monographs based on experiments in ECCE. Each of these documents is a study representing an ongoing experiment quite unique in its origin, experience and prospect. What they all have in common is their focus on the young child. Thus the reader gets a feel of the context within which the need to protect and foster the child arose.

Minâ Swaminathan, the editor of Suraksha, is a social activist who has worked for children for several decades. She deserves credit for bringing together a team of advisors from different disciplines who have shaped these reports so that individual styles coalesce easily with the identity of this series.

Home Away From Home addresses the needs of the middle class family with working women in an urban setting. It is an account of the family day care scene in Bombay based on the doctoral research of the author, Vrinda Dutta. However, unlike a doctoral thesis, the terminology is simple and the review of literature is kept at a minimum. It is an account of 95 families whose children attend 66 different family day care centres in their neighbourhoods. On account of its higher economic status, this section of population is not covered by government support programmes.

The author analyses the merits and demerits of such a system of child care in relation to the other alternatives

available to the urban middle class family. However, the evaluation of the child care system projects is deaf to the child's voice and perspective. The author's appeal for child care networking and national-level advocacy are, however, worth considering.

There is a growing need for out-of-home care of city children during the day. The family day care model, as documented in this monograph, provides a good description of a desirable service for an individual or group that may wish to start a day care centre.

In Sight-On Site. Day Care for Construction Workers' Children is a case study of Mobile Creches, a voluntary organization that was a pioneer in providing protection, care and education to the children of migrant rural labourers in urban areas. The high-point of this document is its absorbing language and style. Facts are important and have to be stated; but just when one begins to expect a descriptive narration, the script changes into personalized anecdotes or a quote from a worker or a mother, and keeps one's interest alive. After a succinct introduction, in the chapter 'Dynamics of Change', the author makes a significant comment on the interface of basic philosophy with human ambition and the compulsions of expansion. Lessons learnt from mistakes of naiveté and sincerity find a cryptic mention here - but a lot is implied.

'A typical day at the centre' is very engaging and reflects both the specifics of a day and of the experiences at the Mobile Creches in general. The author ends with a promising note presenting the role of the Mobile Creches both in advocacy and networking, hoping that this model may be widely replicated.

The text is illustrated with photographs, tables and organograms. One discrepancy is that the reference of Appendix I in chapter 3 does not match the same in the Annexure. A few typographical errors have also crept in.

Kashyap Mankodi's *For the Sake of Children* makes compelling reading. The discourse is attractive, full of humour, satire and catchy titles. Because it is a first-hand account of an NGO trying to 'co-operate' with the government for a good cause, the anguish - familiar to all volunteers trying to work 'with' the government - finds candid expression. A reader who can identify with the painful experience enumerated, will feel like the gawky adolescent who thought that he was the only one with disproportionate limbs, until his peers confessed to similar fears.

Mankodi subtitles his piece 'NGO - Government Partnership in Child Care', but it is really a treatise on what an NGO has in store in running a programme for the government conceived by the government. The setting is Rajasthan and the NGO is the Urmul Rural Health Research and Development Trust. The programme is the well-known ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) which Urmul volunteered to adopt in a limited area of the state.

to serve the neglected sections of the population. As the author admits, despite early fears about such an alliance with the government, Urmul decided to go ahead because 'valour prevailed over discretion'.

The monograph systematically describes the different stages in the birth, development and maintenance of the project for running existing Anganwadis and adding new ones. It emphasises the logistics of organizing and guiding the movement and not the tasks related to the content of the AW programme. This study on macro-level planning and management depicts the flip side of the coin – a side one rarely sees. That is its strength.

Notwithstanding the apprehension it may create in other NGOs hoping to join hands with government in its promise to support human resource development, the report is not a pessimistic one. The spirit of the message is that disillusionment with the government is not reason enough to shut down ongoing community work and that Urmul will continue 'for the sake of (the) children'.

Just when the reader begins to feel that the preceding monographs have not provided an insight into how a motivated individual can begin and take forward a child welfare programme, *Little School On The Hill* fills the gap. This monograph captures the experience of two young people, urban in their training and modern in their vision, but certainly not patronizing in their approach, to the hill people of Mussoorie in U.P.

This is the story of SIDH, a voluntary organization, that opened a balwadi programme in 1990 after having run a primary school. They realized that preschool is integral to the education of disadvantaged children, specially if girls attend school. Vasudha Joshi begins with a systematic listing of steps to start the balwadi and delineates five phases in its growth. That a growing organization is like an organism becomes evident in the account of young teachers, their personal growth and conflicts. The SIDH model in child education exemplifies what most community projects hope for – participation of local workers and the development of human resource.

The chapter on the impact of the programme undertakes an analysis of achievements and failures in the context of school-community relationships. The reflections of the organizers are also articulated. The claim of SIDH that its model is replicable is reasonable considering they have the tools (training manual, a calendar and other materials) to facilitate this process.

The Suraksha series is recommended reading to all students, researchers, educators, trainers, social activists and planners who have an interest in early childhood development and education in India. The booklets are reader-friendly (especially for young impatient ones) with colourful covers and a size that is easy to handle.

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Comment

MOHAMMAD TALIB

Jamia Millia Islamia (hereafter Jamia), celebrates its Platinum Jubilee this year. Seventy five years after its birth, the institution finds itself in a completely different social and historical context today. Yet any ceremonial of remembrance has the magical quality of conjuring a 'presence' in the medium of its absence and is something like applying a face pack upon a ravaged surface. Remember also that science and magic are kindred souls and that perhaps the possibility of rebirth is a discovery soon to be made.

Jamia was born on 29 October 1920, the child of an alliance between Gandhi's call for non-cooperation and the Khilafat movement. A vision of educational freedom was thus its distinguishing birthmark. Notable among those who presided over its birth were Maulana Muhammad Ali, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, Khwaja Abdul Majeed and Zakir Hussain. The founding members of Jamia were a dissident group from the Aligarh Muslim University. They believed that the educational movement led by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was incapable of reforming the Muslim community because of its financial dependence on the British government. Moreover, such state patronage merely produced graduates who became clerks in the colonial administration, cut off from the realities of the world and from their own roots. Thus in their view, the Aligarh Muslim University in its effort to bring about the renaissance of the Muslim community, had chosen to 'prefer a toy in the bargain for eternity'.

Jamia was kindled by a different dream, opting neither for the other-worldly erudition of a *madrasa* (Islamic seminary) nor a this-worldly recognition of the modern educational system. According to Zakir Hussain,

madrasa education promoted a culture which was like the plant whose roots had reached a rocky table, thus deprived of life-giving sap. In contrast, modern education supported a way of life that was like a beautifully arranged bunch of fresh flowers, but which lacked roots and vitality. Jamia drew upon the active kernel of both traditions and blended them in the service of national reconstruction. This tryst of divergent traditions was evident at the inauguration of Jamia. The inaugural ceremony was performed by Shaikh-ul-Hind Maulana Mahmood-al-Hasan, rector of the Deoband Madrasa. The venue was the central mosque named after Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan at the Aligarh Muslim University.

Jamia was a vital component in the great nationalist struggle to build an independent nation as it provided education for life. But more appropriately, it was a venture in 'education for life through life' (a succinct definition of Mahatma Gandhi's conception of *Nai Talim* which Jamia in its theory and practice anticipated by many years).

Jamia, as the grand resolution of nationalist education, rejected the schooling of students into cheap slaves for government office. Before 1947, Jamia accepted neither the state's financial aid nor any other grant with an attached conditionality. It enjoyed autonomy from government intervention or any other external control by a political party. This restraint led to hardships and acute austerity but it enabled education imbued with freedom (*Talimi azadi*) to flourish.

In Jamia, matters of religious faith and the secular world were not treated as being mutually exclusive. In fact, faith came to be understood as the proper handling of the

secular world. Campus life could insulate itself from the artificial and fruitless debates on the dissonance between religion and secular world, between the *Deobandis* and the *Barelvis*, between the sufi and the scholastic Islam and between several other dichotomies. It is no wonder that in those days a student project on the character of the prophet of Islam could take the discussion into the areas of history, geography and social studies. The compatibility of religious and worldly sciences (*dini aur dunyawī uloom main hum ahangi*) was woven into the curriculum itself.

Jamia realised early in its history that the youth of a nation cannot keep a living contact with themselves or the masses unless they received their education through their mother-tongue (*Madri zaban ke zariye talim*) – a medium understood by them and the people. Mastering an idiom that was alien to one's daily life, in terms of meaning and utility, led to the neglect of one's familiar world and one's indigenous knowledge. The use of Urdu as the medium of instruction enabled Jamia students to participate in various literary activities. *Bait bazi* (the Urdu counterpart of literary *antakshari*), *Tamseeli Mushaira* (theatrical simulation of classical and contemporary Urdu poetry), students' self-directed projects on Urdu poets and writers and so on. Besides this, members of the staff at Jamia produced outstanding Urdu translations of European classics.

The concept of 'work school' or 'activity school' handled teaching disciplines creatively, so that the participatory and applied aspect of theoretical knowledge became part of the learners' experience. For students, Jamia became a place for work, experimentation and discovery, not of passive absorption of information. Learning was carried out through concrete life situations, relating to craft or to social and physical environment. Jamia provided its students opportunities to learn and appreciate the cultural, ethical and intellectual values that belong to our shared history. This was a practical lesson in true patriotism (*watan dosti*). Furthermore, the different linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds of its students and teachers was considered a source of enrichment. A typical student of Jamia displayed tolerance and a remarkable quality to understand and appreciate different viewpoints. Such an orientation turned Jamia into a model for a composite Indian nationhood (*muttahiḍa Hindustani qaumiyyat*).

The foregoing account is a potted history of the various motifs of Jamia's success story up to 1947. The institution experienced fewer continuities in post Independence India. The idea of a 'good state' that formed an important part of the national education project after 1947, was handled by state offices run by a band of interpreters of education. After 1947, education was shoved into moulds of official acts, rules and statutes. Gandhi was, in a sense, re-assassinated: this time in spirit and the space vacated was allotted to the spirit of capitalism. During the same period, Jamia suffered from an attack of schizophrenia, lasting for decades together. One self of the Jamia always remained

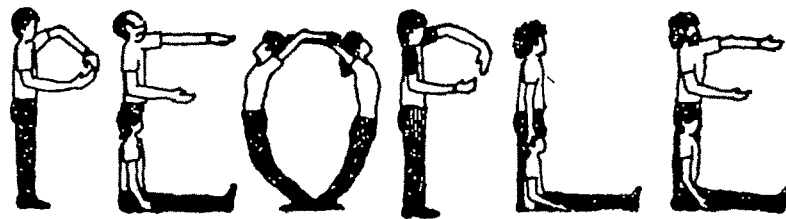
located in deep memory and a nostalgia for the past. The 'other self' had an eye on the shops called the modern universities. The reality of the '80s and the '90s have rendered Jamia's story an enchanting dream signifying nothing. But what can Jamia alone do if historical sensitivity lapses into amnesia and future possibilities collapse into an externalized aura of the present?

Today, Jamia is no longer even schizophrenic. A student of history may be able to explain why weeks before launching the civil disobedience movement in 1930, Mahatma Gandhi visited Jamia and told its students and teachers that visiting Jamia always gave him the sense of a home-coming. Suppose Gandhi is reborn and visits Jamia during the platinum jubilee celebrations, will he still experience that sense of home-coming? He would probably say 'never again' when greeted by Macaulay's educational system liberally appropriated under the stewardship of official interpreters of education, who are academicians in blood and colour, but clerks in tastes, opinions, morals and intellect. He would find it difficult to distinguish a lecture in theology from one in natural or social sciences for both would be parading the value of mere symbols over the reality they were originally meant to represent. And the spectators of this swaggering parade would be hordes of passive students.

It could even be that Gandhi may find it difficult to identify it as an educational institution for he agreed with Zakir Hussain that education should never be mindless and mechanical. His memory of the '30s and the '40s would remind him that Jamia was once a hive of purposeful and creative activities where educational ventures were meaningful and planned projects constantly reflected over to assess their grasp, their reach and social relevance. Gandhi would also meet some recently retired faculty members rejoicing over the fact that they survived their service with no broken bones. That they managed to stay alive without ever being bashed up or hooted out by some of the bearers of the university enrolment numbers. To his utter horror, Gandhi will discover that a learned professor in history, Mushirul Hasan, has been banished from the campus after being beaten up for his views. This shameful event, however, made little difference to most faculty members, who continued with their routine without remorse. In disgust, when Gandhi turns to the officers of Jamia he will be driven away by the secretarial staff on the plea that the officers are busy and that an appointment is necessary to see them.

But what if Gandhi's resurrection takes place from within Jamia, this time in spirit and as a movement in alternative education for the 21st century? Jamia will then show us again a model for reconstructing education for life through life. For this, Jamia will retrieve from its past 'the rules of tending a garden in a desert'. A clue for such a venture may perhaps be found in a Persian couplet from Zakir Hussain's selection of Urdu poetry. 'Colour every thorn in the desert with the blood of your heart.'

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